

The Cat and the Bracelets

by

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Author's note:

The concept for for this text, including the characterizations of the figures, which differ significantly from the various versions in the comic, was completely finished, before the film "The Dark Knight rises" appeared in cinemas around the world. The text itself was almost finished at that time and has received only minor modifications until then.

It was a pleasure to see, that director Christopher Nolan's version of Catwoman differed pleasingly from the one-dimensional stereotype of the previous adaptations and the fine interpretation of the character delivered by the great Anne Hathaway shows some similarities to the way, it had been outlined here.

Prologue: A Partnership of Convenience

Three month before...

Two caped figures met in a dark abandoned store house in the harbor district of Gotham City. They were circling each other ready to counter the opposite's attack. However this was a strange kind of date, not an accidental encounter.

"Batman, I need your help," the smaller of the black-clad figures pleaded with a low but unmistakably female voice, "this is not about you or me, it's about Gotham, everything you fought for." Long dark hair floated smoothly over her shoulders and the eye holes of the mask revealed a pair of bright, brown eyes. A good observer would also have noticed, that the cat-like ears were by no means just fashionable accessories, but actually sophisticated electronic devices, indispensable for her trade, which more or less accidentally resembled cat-like ears, when she did not use them, like now.

"I don't fight every fight anymore, Kitty," the tall man in the famous bat-costume said. The latter was equally well equipped with electronic gadgets, which

partially determined the appearance of a huge bat, although the latter was deliberately intended. "Only if it is worth the effort. I'm tired of aiming for big shot mobsters, who turn out merely as a better kind of egg thieves," he made his point.

"If you would think I would offer you something like this, you would not be here," she replied. "Batman, this is a matter of life and death, and we're the only ones, who can stop this evil," the woman in the equally legendary catsuit insisted.

The latter was less the fashionable garment it superficially resembled than a clever designed and full featured fighting suit. Actually a skin tight, it revealed a slim, but muscular figure of undeniably favorable feminine proportions. It was no wonder, that numerous rumors brought the Cat into connection with almost every beautiful female celebrity in town.

"We may not be friends, but I think we both agree, that this is a serious threat to every ordinary citizen here and I don't know someone else, who has the means, knowledge and guts to stop it." She was tall for a woman, which was the reason,

that some of the few who had seen the Cat in action claimed, that she wore high heels. In reality the heavy “cat-boots” she wore, while matching the color of her suit were more suitable for a paratrooper in action than for a night on the dance floor.

“Actually we’re kind of enemies...,” he remarked. His eyes, which followed every single one of her movements showed, that he was careful and did not trust her. The same was true vice versa as well.

“No,” she objected, “well, not really. At least we always fought in accordance with the rules. If whoever is behind these senseless killings takes Gotham over, there will be no rules anymore, only people who kill or will be killed. Batman, we’ve to stop this.” She did not say what she considered to be the rules, but the man in the bat-suit seemed to know.

“Why should I trust you today?” He asked instead. “Give me a sensible reason. You’ve always played your own games.”

“But not here and not now,” she insisted, “I swear, Batman. I can’t go to the police with, what I know. They won’t believe me and even, if they would, they won’t achieve anything. You know better than anyone else, that I’m telling the truth.” The mocking tone had disappeared. She was deadly serious now.

“Why don’t you ask the Penguin or the Joker to fight on your side? They are both running free, and rumors circulating regularly in the city say, that you come along quite well with both of them.”

“These rumors are not true, and you know that,” the feline objected, “I’ve al-

ways been independent. But if you agree to help me, I’ll put myself under your command unconditionally, as long as it may take. Does this satisfy your big alpha-male-ego?” She did not expect an answer and continued, “afterwards we’ll go our ways again, no demasking no regrets, just a partnership-of-convenience for a strictly limited time – how about that?”

“Really?” He asked and his voice told her, that he understood, but did not believe in her words. She surrounded him with her incomparable cat-like grace, and he kept an eye on her, carefully not to turn his back on her. From experience he knew very well, that her graceful, long legs were dangerous weapons, when they suddenly crashed into someone’s face.

Although he was a well-trained man, who towered her by five inches and outweighed her by at least forty pounds, he considered the Cat to be a respectable foe. He had no doubts, that he could defeat her, but underestimating her fighting capabilities might in retrospect turn out to have been a literally fatal mistake.

“I’m serious, you’ve my word,” she said and demanded, “put me on a test.”

“Good,” the tall man replied in the deep guttural Batman voice. He produced a black metal object with bat-shaped form, she knew very well from his utility belt. “Give me your hands.”

“WHAT?” The woman behind the cat-mask blurted out, taken by surprise. “We’re going to fight the Dragons, I’m not the enemy.” She took a quick step backwards, smooth and soundless.

“You failed the test,” he said and put the *bat-cuffs* back in the pocket of his belt. The Cat hesitated for a second, but then she approached him again slowly, on alert, her muscles ready for action. One false movement and this would be the start of a fight. The situation was tense.

“Okay. Put them on me,” she said slowly and extended her wrists in parallel, the gloved hands spread outwards.

“Take that gloves off, first” he requested. “They are sometimes not what they seem to be.” Obviously he did not trust her – this was based on reciprocity.

“These are simple leather gloves,” she ensured him truthfully, but took them off and put them into a barely visible pocket of her catsuit. She extended her wrists again and he took the well-known bat-shaped *handcuffs* out of their encasement again without taking his eyes from her. He looked straight into the brown eyes behind the mask. Then he clicked the ratchets down to what he knew would be a not over-tight, but inescapable fit.

“Is this really necessary?” She asked and took a quick step backwards, when he released her wrists, again with her natural, cat-like grace. She flexed the *hinged* joint of her new ‘*bracelets*’ to the limits.

“It’s a confidence-building measure,” he said and approached her slowly, demonstrating, that he was not up to hurt her. He gripped her joined hands and pressed a tiny button on the base of both *circlets*, which held her wrists in a tight grip. This engaged the double locks. When he released her hands again

she twisted them immediately up to the preset limits to examine the device.

“Nice peace of hardware,” she said and shook her joined hands, “but inconvenient. How long do I’ve to wear them?”

“Only, as long as it will take to fight those Dragons,” he stated seriously.

“WHAT?” She exclaimed in fury, “how am I supposed to fight with those on?”

“You’re not supposed to fight,” he said, “you’re supposed to provide information and observe. In case I should fail you may do, what you think is necessary.”

“That’s not fair and not logical,” she said, “I can fight as tough as you and...”

“... you don’t have any discipline,” he cut her speech. “Those will reduce your ever-present temptation to do something stupid.” He wanted to add ‘and to hurt yourself’, but these words somehow stood between them without being spoken.

“I can still retreat,” she said stubbornly, casually ignoring the fact, that wearing the *cuffs* gave her a big disadvantage, if he should decide not to keep his word.

“You can,” he said friendly, “but it was you who came to me and asked for help.”

“And? Will you take those off?” She asked and raised her metal-joined hands.

“You’ve my word on it,” he replied assuringly, “but we won’t have a deal then.”

“And if I should choose to wear these ‘bracelets’, we have one?” She asked.

“Of course,” he confirmed, “according to exactly the conditions, you just stated.”

“And you’ll take those off afterwards? – And everything between us will be as before?” She reassured herself once again.

“If that’s your wish, yes,” he said firmly, “but maybe we’ll understand and trust each other better than before.”

“But why should I trust YOU here and now?” She asked, “you demand A LOT.”

“Because I give you my word as a crusader.” He said, as if the latter words would be the answer to all questions.

“And your word is good for that?” He was not sure what she was up to and hesitated for a second. She realized, that the thought, that anybody could not trust his word, had never occurred to this man.

“You would not have allowed me to put those ‘bracelets’ on you, if you would not believe in that,” he finally responded to her question, and she nodded slowly.

“Okay, boss,” she replied mockingly in order to dub, that there had been more in the last words than they had literally told her, “what are we going to do next?”

“Well,” he cleared his throat, “we’ll go to a secure place and you’ll tell me what you know – EVERYTHING.” He made the last word sound like a military order in an obvious attempt to change the topic.

“And then you’ll tell me, what you know, too?” She asked pretending to resume her previous obstinate position.

“Of course,” he said almost relieved.

“Everything?” She was persistent.

“Look, Kitty,” he said, “as I see our current commitment, we are partners concerning this matter for the time being. This means I’ll tell you honestly EVERYTHING I know about this matter, and you’ll do likewise. Is that okay with you?”

“Purrfectly, okay,” she mourned and

proved her Flexibility by bending her body backwards in a perfect cat-like bow, whereby she managed to shake her *cuffed* wrists. His eyes followed her movement in silent admiration. She turned back to him and looked at the *steel circlets*, as if she recognized them for the first time.

“Those are inconvenient,” she said and, when he did not react, she continued, “I can’t drive for example and...”

“Your ‘bracelets’ stay on,” he said, “and we’ll take my car.” He turned on his heels, smiling perfectly satisfied under his mask, which she could not see, because he had turned away from her, and left without looking, if she was following him.

“Meow, as you wish, Master,” the Cat purred and followed him. He opened the side door galantly and she slipped into the seat. When he entered the driver’s seat, she had managed somehow to engage the seat-belt already despite her joined hands. He acknowledged this, engaged his own belt, started the engine of the famous Batmobile and entered the traffic flow.

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“Cool car,” she remarked almost conversationally, “but there’s a little power gap between 2,500 and 3,500 rpm.”

“Where do you know that from?” A light tremor in his voice revealed, that she had managed to take him by surprise.

“I’ve made a trial run, two months ago,” she stated the impossible with a smile, “while you were in Europe.” She had to admit, that he recovered fast.

“What else did you find?” He asked almost conversationally, but only his mask prohibited her to see, that the security of his mansion had earned top-priority.

“The breaks could be stronger and, if you pull them at full speed, the car drifts off to the right, which is not an optimal behaviour in critical situations,” she explained like an Indy-Car mechanic.

“Well, that confirms my findings,” he replied dryly. “It’s corrected already.”

“May I convince myself?” She asked, “I mean, after I’ll be allowed to take your generous ‘charm-bracelets’ off, ‘Master’.”

“We’ll talk about it,” he said slightly irritated. “However, those *bracelets* stay on and in the mean-time...” he paused.

“Yes, ‘Master’,...?” She gave him her best Barbara-Eden-memorial-look.

“In the mean time don’t call me ‘Master’,” he said resigning and swallowed, what he originally had intended to say.

“Yes, boss,” she said celebrating her small victory with a smile. They arrived at a building in the outskirts, which looked like it was in bad shape, but the garage opened automatically and, once they were inside, everything was apparently in best condition. He disengaged his belt, opened the door and was not surprised, that the woman behind the cat-mask had disengaged the seat-belt and opened the passenger door on her own.

“Don’t wanna’ take those off,” she purred referring to his *bat-cuffs*, which still decorated her wrists, flexing their hinged joint, “they are REALLY inconvenient.”

“No,” he said and observed that she

reached for the well hidden button, which engaged the secret lift downwards.

“I’ve been here before,” she explained her knowledge observing his reaction.

“I know,” he replied, “it was last spring time. You don’t expect me to show you something you don’t know already?”

“So your security isn’t so bad at all. What camera did I overlook?” She asked.

“The one inside the dead light,” he replied. “You’ve been careless, Kitty. It could have been a booby-trap as well.”

“You don’t use booby-traps, boss,” she said, “it would violate your principles.”

“But a narcotic gas would not,” he replied, “it would have been a unique opportunity to catch the Cat.” She did not answer. They entered the secret chamber beyond the building. He went straight to a graphic terminal and activated it.

“Do you know the password?” He asked casually, before he started typing.

“I’m sorry, but that’s not covered by our temporary partnership-of-convenience,” she replied seriously.

“Okay, I’ll change it anyway,” he said and typed it in. She looked away. He made a few clicks and an overview about the infrastructure of Gotham City appeared on the screen which offered more detailed presentation in several ways.

“That’s a just in time representation of the city,” he explained. She nodded.

“But for our purposes it’s useless, if you don’t have the data, where the incidents occurred,” she remarked dryly.

“No problem!” He hit a few buttons after which the picture showed markers

for more than three dozens points offering further information. He moved the mouse pointer over one of them and a pop up revealed a time and a short description of a crime, which had happened there. "All murders committed by spotless citizens without apparent reasons in the last three weeks," he stated proudly.

"I guess, that Jim Gordon does not know, that he has a big data-leak here," she remarked with an invisible smirk.

"He does not have to know everything," the man in the bat-suit replied with a smile. Then he became serious again: "Do you recognize any pattern?"

"Not immediately," she said. "You can add an attempted murder in the edge of 42nd and 37th street three days ago."

"Which you did not report to the police," he said with a trace of disapproval.

"Even you would not have reported it," she replied, "the guy who tried to do it was innocent, he was completely driven by a force, which was not his own will. He moved like a zombie. I took him out of action and he did not remember anything." What she did not mention was, that it had been a hell of a fight, but Batman knew that from experience. He had also defeated one of these human robots, who had fought like a madman. However, in this case the subject had not survived.

"Okay," he said, "we are looking for something, which transmits this force, or the way, which someone has found, in order to take control over these people."

"And what, whoever is responsible, did to prepare these people for their mis-

sion," she added. "If it would be possible to manipulate anyone without preparation, we would be zombies as well."

"Right," he said. "I found, that all these incidents have appeared within a corridor of five hundred meters along from these axis." He made some mouse-movements, and a straight line appeared dividing the city almost into two parts."

"And that's almost, where the new ultra-high-speed data-highway lies, the mayor is going to present us next week," she revealed unexpected knowledge.

"That would be here," he stated noddingly and did some manipulations, after which the corresponding data-line, which was not officially announced yet, appeared on screen. "It works in the Tera Hertz frequency region," he muttered not anticipating, that she understood.

"And that fits purrfectly to this," she said and produced a pinhead-sized black pearl from one of the numerous, almost invible pockets of her fighting suit.

"What's it?" This surprise was his.

"I think, a receiver and maybe also a transmitter," she stated, "and the size is compatible with the frequency range, you mentioned." He looked up and whistled.

"I've always known, that you're a remarkable woman," he replied with honest recognition, "what I did not know was, that you know something about physics."

"You big guys always think, that you're the only ones, who can add one and one," she replied nonchalantly with a grin.

"Anyway," he said, "where did you get this thing from? How did they achieve,

that such a tiny device was not lost?”

“It was behind his ear,” she replied, “I cut it out, while he was unconscious. It was a small cut, nothing serious.” She raised her joined hands and flexed the hinged joint of the *bat-cuff* to its limit. “How about taking these ‘bracelets’ off, now?” He ignored the latter question.

“And how did you find it?” He asked, “I mean this thing is damned small.”

“You should know, that a company named Wayne Enterprises makes these fabulous scanners,” she said, “they are not for sale, but I wouldn’t go out without one in my pocket. I guess you forgot yours, when you stopped the mysterious attacker at the Gershwin energy plant?”

“So you know that, too,” he said, “it was not in the news. However the poor guy was swallowed the air-intake of a turbine. There was not much to scan.”

“I’m sorry,” she replied, “I did not know that. However, I think, I’ve provided enough information to be trustworthy now.” She extended her wrists still confined by the *steel circlets* of his *bat-cuffs*.

“And you promised something, remember?” He replied, “I found out, that all thirty-nine victims – that excludes the one you’ve prevented from doing, what he was forced to do, have been in the ambulance of the Gotham General Hospital before. I bet, that everyone of them received one of those transmitters there.”

“That’s a good hypothesis,” she said, “but, what, do you think, is the motive behind these attacks? It doesn’t make sense to bring spotless citizens to kill their fel-

low citizens. That’s only disgusting.”

“I suspect, these crimes are only a perfide test. The new data highway, respectively its technology ought to be used to connect every public authority of Gotham with each other within one year, that’s still a secret, but one of our mayor’s favorite projects. If someone’s able to control potentially everyone, who works next to this data line, he or she...”

“... will control the whole city,” she completed his sentence. “How do you think whoever’s behind this wants to get these transmitters to or, if my encounter was generic, into the elected victims?”

“Well, they’re very small, they may swallow them with food or receive them by a seemingly harmless procedure during the annual medical examination, which is accidentally conducted at the GGH.”

“So that’ll be our next target,” she concluded, and he nodded affirmatively.

“But before we do that, I’ll give Barbara a short briefing of our findings, so that her father can initiate some appropriate counter-measures,” he replied.

“A courtesy for your fiancé?” She asked kind of disquietingly, “or why should Batgirl become involved?”

“She’s not my fiancé,” he replied. Mockingly he added, “you’ve no reason to be jealous – seriously, Kitty, the reason to use Barbara as a mediator is to gain some time for the two of us to collect facts, before the police has a chance to wipe out all traces.” He did not look into her face while he said that, but a very intent observer, who did, might have noticed or

might have got the impression to notice the trace of a smile behind the cat-mask.

“May I assume, that Wayne Enterprises will provide those very useful scanners?” She asked. “They’re expensive.”

“You can definitely be sure, that they won’t earn a cent from it,” he replied.



The dispositions were made according to this proposal before they drove to the Gotham General Hospital. Half an hour later the Batmobile arrived at a dark place not far away from the hospital. Two dark-clad figures escaped from it. They sneaked unnoticed to the shell of a still unfinished building next by and entered the hospital quietly from there through an open window on the third floor.

Batman offered Catwoman gallantly support for a hazardous jump, but she refused and managed it easily. He noted disapproval, but when he was sure, she was not looking in his direction, he looked a little bit longer at her than necessary, admiring the grace, with which she managed to accomplish things.

It was simply fascinating to watch, how she moved. He had intended to remove ‘her’ *bat-cuffs* before this operation, but that seemed unnecessary and, if he admitted the truth, he was amazed to watch how the Cat dealt with them.

In this way, undetected by the unsuspecting night shift, two shadows entered the unoccupied personal office and went through the staff roster for the last few

days. With Batman’s correlated list of the victims, it was easy to find out, that a man named Dr. Nathan Whiteman was the only person involved in all cases.

Since his personal file also revealed, that he had been working in a leading position on a high-tech military government program, whose contents were classified before, there was little doubt, that he had not only the knowledge to implement the transmitters, but also the means to obtain and operate the high-tech equipment involved. Yet, even a very well founded suspicion was no proof.

If someone would have been able to observe the intruders, he would have noticed, that the smaller one of these shadows, whose outline was definitely a feminine one, kept her hands in close proximity, while doing the investigative work. However, her movements were so fluent and natural, that not even a trained investigator would have guessed, that the black strangely shaped objects on her wrists, could be anything else than tools of her trade or an exotic kind of jewelry.

According to the work plan in the personal office Dr. Whiteman actually had had the morning shift, so his office ought to be empty now. Therefore the Bat and the Cat decided to seize the opportunity in order to to pay it an unannounced visit.

There was nothing remarkable in his office except for a brand new safe of Luthor Corp. It was the latest model, and on his own insistence Batman undertook an attempt to open it, while Catwoman investigated the contents of his desk. But

his elaborate attempts were unsuccessful.

"I think, we have to come back with more sophisticated equipment," he whispered addressed at her, "this safe has a brand new Mod. 22 lock. It's useless."

"Let me see," the Cat demanded. He did not object, and with the aid of the electronic devices, she wore on her head, she investigated the lock on her own.

"You've got a .2-screw pick?" She asked after a few seconds of fumbling.

"Sure," he said, "but I've also tried it one already." He was still certain, that she could not succeed, where he had failed.

"Give it to me," she demanded and, when he reached her the tiny piece of metal, the Cat inserted it into the lock and started once more to fumble at it.

"It's useless," Batman whispered, "the bolts of these locks are twisted..."

"I know," she said and he could swear she was smiling under the mask. "Voilà!" With this word the safe popped open.

"Impressive," he remarked and the tone of his voice revealed, that he was indeed impressed. "How did you do that?"

"Business secret," she replied dryly. "It would have been easier if you would've allowed me to take those off before," she said referring to the *bat-cuffs*, which still adorned her wrists. He did not react.

"Let's see what's inside," he said instead, ignoring her comment. There was some money, a presumably forged passport and driving license and a little box containing at least a dozen of the tiny transmitters. They looked at each other.

"Got him," she commented their find-

ings, and Batman nodded affirmatively.

"That was definitely good work, Kitty" he said seriously, "and it's you, who deserves to get the main credit for it."

"Don't talk about it," she replied, "I was never here, and we've never met. I guess our cooperation is finished now."

"If you insist," he said, "but I may say that it was a pleasure to work with you, and that I owe you one. You'd also make a really great addition to the bat-family."

"No thanks," she said and turned away from him. "I prefer to stay independent. I guess these belong to you." With these words she reached him the opened *bat-cuffs* she had miraculously managed to remove from her wrists. He shook his head.

"You're amazing," he said, "can I give you a ride to your Catmobile? I think it's parked in the Carnegie Lane. That's a view miles to walk." He could see her brown eyes widening behind the mask.

"It's bugged?" It was no question. "I've checked the usual frequencies regularly."

"Forgive me, but I liked to know, where you are," he replied with a smile just to become serious: "Is there really nothing I can do to convince you to join us?" He asked. "Maybe we could learn from each other. I've to admit, that my lock-picking skills cannot match yours."

"Nothing," she said, "I'm the Cat, and cats have their own will." With these words she literally disappeared in the night. He did not follow her. If it was her decision to put an end to their "liaison" here and now, it was her right to do so.

"We'll meet again, Kitty" Batman

muttered after she had left. "And the time will come, when even you'll need someone, you've to trust." He put the *bat-cuffs* back into his utility-belt. "However, these are in need of a thorough revision."



Batman did not want to appear in the news as well. All facts, were given to the police anonymously via Barbara Gordon, the Batgirl, and so Gotham's continuously overworked police force was able to close just another difficult case of potentially apocalyptic consequences very quickly without having much to do for it.

Dr. Nathan Whiteman was arrested, when he arrived at the hospital in the early morning. The equipment necessary to transfer orders to the transmitters was found approximately at the same time by a squad-team headed by Sargent Barbara Gordon in his flat. From there a direct access to one of the maintenance points of the new data-highway had been established. The equipment to do that, was also found, supporting the evidence, that he had been working on his own bill.

Wayne industries provided the scanners necessary to detect the dangerous implants for free. By means of this advanced equipment more than a dozen tiny devices were discovered at different places in the bodies of innocent officials and afterwards removed by surgery.

All of them had undergone the annual medical check at the GGH recently. So it was evident, that all victims had received the dangerous hardware there and that

the Bat and the Cat had solved the case completely. When confronted with the complete chain of facts, the arrested suspect confessed and revealed, that he had never overcome, that he had been dismissed from his government work.

This spared him the electrical chair. Nevertheless he was convicted for a life-sentence. Of course the government involvement itself, was kept out of the headlines, and nobody asked, for what sinister purposes the evil high-tech products had been developed in the first place.

Although his daughter didn't reveal the source of her information and spoke of an anonymous hint, police commissioner Jim Gordon concluded, who had to be at least partially responsible, and so Batman received a call on the bat-phone.

"I can't accept your thanks," he replied honestly, "I was involved, but only as a, let's say, supporting actor. The real credit goes to a very talented young woman, who unfortunately insists, that her name is not mentioned as well."

"Well," Jim Gordon said, "thank her than in the name of the Gotham force. You know, we take every help we can get."

"Well, even I don't know how to reach her right now," Batman replied, "but I've some personal interest to talk to her, too." He had intended to tell him confidentially on her behalf, that it had been the notorious Catwoman, who had solved the case and saved the city, but decided against it, because this would violate his promise not to reveal her involvement.



Chapter 1

Arrested

Supergirl and Wonder Woman had never been friends. Nevertheless today the two super-heroines had teamed up a second time in the same month in order to save Gotham City. While Supergirl was more or less a regular in the city news for more than two years by now, Wonder Woman had shown up only recently. She was more or less on a casual visit.

The nuclear power plant had gone over-critical due to an airplane crash. Wonder Woman had not wasted any time and used her tremendous powers to evacuate the people around, while Supergirl, who was immune to the radioactive radiation sealed the plant and achieved, that the outbreak of radioactive waste remained at a bearable minimum.

Gotham's mayor had insisted on a press conference with the two super-heroines in order to thank them for their extraordinary commitment. Diana Prince, the raven-haired Amazon from Paradise Island and Kara Zor-El the blond beauty from Krypton were other-

wise no friends of public presentations.

However since the situation had been very severe and the request had been announced officially, while they were still in action, it was difficult and would not have been understood by major parts of the population, if they would have ignored it.

So Kara and Diana had reluctantly agreed to participate. The two super-heroines towered most of the officials. They endured the public speech, arms crossed in front. When the mayor addressed them, they both found a view warm words and retreated eager to leave, respectively fly away, when a couple of police officers entered the scene.

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“Wonder Woman and Supergirl?” Despite his attempts to make this question sound professional, the lieutenant, who asked it, a veteran of the force seemed to be nervous. He was a big man, at least three inches taller than Supergirl, with

broad shoulders and enough years of service in order to have experienced everything a policeman could possibly face in Gotham, yet facing these legendary figures he did not seem to feel very well.

“Yes, what can we do for you?” Kara answered politely. He took a deep breath, gathered all his courage and prepared himself for, whatever might happen.

“Ladies, I am sorry, but we have a valid warrant for your arrest!” He declared bravely. Kara was speechless, she had expected a request for help in a difficult situation, maybe an invitation to take part in some ceremony – she had never understood the human fondness for celebrations – but definitely not this. It was Diana who blurted out immediately.

“WHAT? We have just saved the city and this country from the biggest disaster since Chernobyl, and you want to arrest us?” She was more than upset and two officers who accompanied the speaker stepped back pale in the face fearing, that the mighty super-heroine might get physical. The grey-haired lieutenant however was a truly brave man, he did not retreat.

“I know what you did, Ladies,” he replied in an effort to ease the situation, “and I appreciate it.” He visibly tried to choose his words carefully. “Sometimes it is no fun to do our duties, and this is certainly true for me now, but we have the explicit order from the district attorney to arrest both of you, according to this warrant.” He presented them an official sheet of paper. Kara disregarded it.

“What for?” She asked reasonably.

“The accusation is involuntary manslaughter,” the lieutenant replied, giving Kara a thankful glance. She was at least willing to listen to him.

“You must be crazy,” Diana interrupted him – she was still furious. “We did not harm anybody, who did not deserve it, your mayor just thanked us for rescuing a few hundred people, and many of them are here to testify this.”

“Mam, I know about your merits and it is everything else than a pleasure for me to execute this warrant, but it does not refer to today’s events. The D.A.’s office received a video, which seems to show, that you purposely ignored a complete wagon with forty passengers, which fell down Lincoln bridge last week, when you prevented those two trains from colliding,” he explained the allegations.

“I honestly regret, the death of these people,” Kara argued sensibly, “and I can’t deny we were involved. But Diana and I were fully occupied in order to stop these trains. This did not allow for a hesitation. It was impossible for us to foresee, that the last wagon could derail due to our actions, while it was still on the bridge.”

“I personally agree with you, Supergirl,” the lieutenant tried to emphasize his sympathies. “However some lawyers, hired by the bereaved of those who died, when this particular rail car crashed, have argued, that, while you doubtlessly saved the lifes of the drivers and the passengers in the foremost wagons of both trains, their relatives died only because of your actions and probably would have sur-

vived the crash, if you would not have got involved. They demand compensation. That's what this warrant is about."

"And what do you think, we should have done, look away and ignore the crash?" Diana threw in. "This would have probably been filed by the beraved of the many more peoply we've actually rescued, as a failure to render assistance." She was clearly still upset but now her voice indicated at least some understanding.

"Ladies, I am on you side, and I am sure, the judge will see it that way too," the lieutenant began diplomatically. "However the complaint against you is formally well-founded and therefore the D.A.'s office was forced to press charges against you," he explained and added, "believe me, the D.A. himself is a big fan of yours and was not amused, that he actually had to file this warrant."

"How do you intend to prevent us from flying away?" Diana asked frankly.

"I know, that we have no means to arrest Supergirl or you against your will," he conceded in order to continue, "but in this town both of you have the reputation to defend AND respect the law."

"I can speak only for myself, but I am committed to serve divine justice not human law," Diana replied. She wanted to turn away, but Kara grabbed her forearm.

"Wait a minute, Diana," she insisted, "the law applies to everyone. Just because we have powers far beyond human capabilities, does not make us better than anyone else here. We have not done anything wrong, and I am sure, that we can prove

this in court. To fly away might as well be interpreted as an admission of guilt."

"Do what you want, I do not see any reason to let myself be arrested by these men," Diana made it sound finally.

"That's the argument of a dictators and criminals, Diana, 'I do what I want to do because I can do it'. We are bound in honor to be better than that, aren't we?" Kara asked suggestively. These grave words did not fail their purpose.

"Okay, I got your message, Kara," Diana conceded reluctantly. "However, I can only hope we won't regret it. Gentlemen, we will accompany you voluntarily."

"Thank you, ladies. I am sure this misunderstanding will be settled very soon." He sounded relieved. "There is however a little plea we have to address to both of you. It's more or less a formality."

"What is it?" Kara asked.

"Well I know in your case this is completely ridiculous, but as you might know, since this has been debated extensively in public for some time, we are required to *handcuff* everyone, who's to be arrested, literally without exceptions, and political correctness requires, that this also applies to you and Wonder Woman – although in your cases this is completely absurd."

"WHAT?" Diana blurted out in anger, "you want to parade us around in *handcuffs* – like you do with common criminals?"

"I am sorry, Mam, but that's a service regulation. If you don't tell it to my superiors, I promise to remove your *cuffs* as soon as we'll be out of the spotlight."

"Come on, Diana," said Kara, "It's not

a big deal.” She turned back to the lieutenant and extended her wrists together hands tilted outwards like she had seen in human television in order to let him cuff her. “Do, what you have to do, officer.”

“Eh,... at the back, Supergirl, if you don’t mind,” the lieutenant stammered uneasy if she was serious, “it’s required.”

“Okay, this way then,” she said and turned around. He wanted to take his cuffs out, when one his colleagues intervened.

“We should use these ones, Sir, for the show.” He reached him a pair of black chain-linked handcuffs, which were considerably more massive than usual police issue ones. The connecting chain allowed for almost four inches of separation. So these seemingly antique shackles were not particularly restrictive. Kara did not care.

She was sure, she could smash or tear apart everything humans could create or fabricate. The antique cuffs closed with a distinct click around both of her wrist one after another. They were tight, but not tight enough to burst apart, when she simply clenched her fists.

“For heaven’s sake, be careful, Supergirl,” the lieutenant, who had observed her motion, after he had applied the cuffs, whispered,, “it would be embarrassing for us, if you accidentally rip those apart.”

“I’m sorry, officer. I promise to be careful,” Kara replied with a smile. “Come on, Diana, they don’t hurt.”

“You don’t know, what you request,” she mumbled and turned her back to the officer. She took a deep breath and brought her wrists together behind

her back. This time the lieutenant took his genuine service handcuffs out of his pocket. Diana was obviously not prominent enough to receive a VIP treatment.

Kara noted in passing, that the latter were joined by hinge type of joint, which allowed to fold them together, but not to twist or turn them against each other. He flipped the ratchets through their counterparts and the bows clasped around Diana’s wrists with a serious of clicks.

Although this made no sense, the lieutenant habitually took his time to adjust the fit of the manacle and then he pinpointed both cuffs with the head of the key, before he let Diana’s hands go. A photoflash appeared. Someone nearby had used his cell phone cam in order to catch a photo of Diana in handcuffs. Kara, who stood next by with her hands equally fixed behind her back, saw that Diana pulled on her cuffs in anger. She nudged her fellow super-heroine, with her foot.

“Be careful, these things are not made to hold one of us.” she whispered.

“Right now, they hold me quite well,” Diana whispered back angrily.

“Would you please follow me, ladies,” another officer advised them, and the two freshly arrested super-heroines were escorted to the front of a police cruiser.

The police lieutenant kept his promise. When they were around the block and out of sight, he stopped the car and opened Kara’s front door.

“Thank you very much, Supergirl, for participating in the show. Please allow me to take your cuffs off,” he said and re-

leased her wrists from the inconvenient accessories. He regarded the old fashioned looking black *fetters* with distaste.

He produced an odd looking little safe-type key, eyed it carefully in order to fumble it into the fairly tiny keyholes.

“The press officer found these in the evidence vault,” he explained, “and someone’s decided, they would look more impressive for a super-heroine arrest, because they are different.” He explained the clumsy fumbling, before he pocketed them together with the key.

He repeated the procedure with Diana, who was visibly relieved, and so they both remained unrestrained for the rest of the ride and the booking procedure.

At the police headquarter the two super-heroines were actually treated like favorite guests not like prisoners. They did not have to attend a jail cell but were served with coffee instead. Many police officers wanted to welcome them and praised them for their numerous heroic deeds. Some even asked for autographs.

However two hours later, the head of the department, which had hosted them so generously so far appeared and expressed politely, that they much to his regret had to see the judge together with the other woman prisoners busted today.

“I am sorry, ladies, but I’ve been informed, that cameras will be present and this means, you have to be *handcuffed* again, however in front will suffice this time.” He had the *cuffs* they had worn at hand and Kara extended her wrists in order to let him apply them. Kara was not

very interested even did not look at them, otherwise she might have noticed, that those old-fashioned, black *cuffs* she had worn before, were not snapped on like the modern ones, but had to be locked manually with their strange looking key

After she had endured it, Kara raised her joined hands carefully and took a look at ‘her’ reaquired ‘*bracelets*’. She playfully thought about using her X-ray vision in order to see the locking mechanism.

“I know, that you might have heard this before, Supergirl,” the officer, who feared that she might disrupt them, distracted her, “but, please, be gentle to those. They may look like some high tech thing, but actually they are just old crap, someone’s found in the evidence vault. It would be embarrassing for the Gotham police department if you rip them apart in front of those cameras.” Kara nodded.

“I promise to be careful, officer,” she replied generously and grabbed her left hand with her right one in a maiden pose, so that her wrists were closely together and the short *chain* dangled freely between them. He turned to Diana.

“Is there a reason, why Kara gets different *cuffs*?” The latter asked askance.

“Not really, Wonder Woman,” he replied, “the press officer wanted something, which looked more formidable on television, but we had only one pair of those, and since Supergirl is more prominent here, we decided to put those on her. I hope you are not upset about this.”

“Shall we switch the *cuffs*?” Kara asked gruffly turned to her and raised her joined

hands again, "I don't insist on those."

"No it's quite okay," Diana stated appeasingly, "but, officer, if I could ask you a little favor, I would prefer to be *cuffed* by a female officer. It's more personal from woman to woman, so to say." The officer looked as if he thought, she was nuts, but was about to grant her wish.

"Come on, Diana," Kara intervened, indicating her joined hands, "I cannot comply about the lieutenant's handwork. We already got a preferential treatment. There is no reason to call someone else away from her duties." Petulantly Diana gave in against better knowledge and allowed him to affix the *hinged handcuffs*.



They were escorted to a prison transport bus together with three other female prisoners, all restrained like Diana with *hinged handcuffs* in front. Only Kara, who wore her *cuffs* like expensive *bracelets*, careful not to put any stress on the connecting *chain* was differently equipped.

The ride itself was uneventful, but when the bus arrived at the court building, it was expected by a crowd of spectators. These were usually not allowed to approach the bus, but the news about two super-heroines being arrested had rocked the media all over the country, and some news pope had obtained the allowance to show their arrival on television.

The rest of the gathered reporters objected violently and the consequence of their revolution was, that only a close

gateway around the bus was cleared by the police and half a dozen camera teams and at least three dozen accredited photographers populated the internal courtyard usually not accessible to the public in order to take their shots.

Dozens of lights flashed when Kara appeared on the stage of the bus. She was clearly not amused, but managed to produce a smile. She resisted the temptation to raise her joined wrists in order to hide her face, but kept them casually at waist-level, when she left the bus.

Nevertheless a knee-upwards color photo with her in *handcuffs* made it on the title page of Gotham News, despite what had happened before and doubled this papers usual run. The inquirer had a shot of an angry Diana on the front page when she turned around with both hands seemingly securely enclosed in tight-fitting pair of *hinged handcuffs*. The owner of this paper was also pleased with the sales.

No reporters were allowed to follow them inside, but also none of their guards had bothered to remove 'their' *handcuffs*. The two super-heroines had to appear before the judge with them in place.

The judge acknowledged their merits for the community and expressed his doubts, that the allegations were justified, but since the two caped super-heroines could not provide a permanent home address, he had no choice than to commit them to spend the three days, until their trial was sheduled, in prison.

The two super-heroines were clearly not amused about this proposition. Di-

ana clenched her fists and pulled on her *cuffs*. Kara, who had resisted the temptation to do so herself, observed it and nudged her fellow super-heroine again.

“Be careful,” she whispered, “you are complicating things, if you rip those off.”

“I can’t rip my *cuffs* apart,” Diana whispered back, “I’m as helpless as every human prisoner who has to wear these things!” This took Kara by surprise.

“You mean, you cannot rip them apart? But you can fly and stop trains like me. Why can’t you just snap those *cuffs*?”

“It’s Aphrodite’s law,” Diana explained, “We don’t talk about it. But once an Amazon is bound or otherwise restrained by a man, she loses her powers. Since you urged me to let this man apply them to me, I am stuck with these stupid *handcuffs* as any of those offenders, who took the bus ride together with us.”

“That’s, why you wanted to be restrained by a female officer?” Kara understood quickly. “If I had known this...”

“Right, Miss Superwoman,” Diana snarled, “females don’t count. If this were done by a female, I could fly away like you and, believe me, I would do so right now.”

“Keep calm, you will get your powers back, once you are uncuffed, don’t you?”

“Yes, and I will use them!” However Diana had to wait. They were escorted back to the local prison. Kara still treating her *cuffs* carefully like bracelets while Diana occasionally pulled on them in anger and frustration, but to no avail.

Kara’s take in procession at the city jail was simple, she carried practically not

much more than her Supergirl-suit, which she was allowed to keep. Only ‘her’ *cuffs* caused an apparently minor problem.

“Sorry, Supergirl, they forgot to send us the key for ‘your’ *cuffs*. They are not standard, and someone simply forgot to send them to us. I am sorry, but you will have to bear them a few hours longer. Except if you choose to rip them apart, in which case you have to pay for them.”

“I have worn these *bracelets* for some time by now, I can as well wear them a little bit longer,” Kara conceded without paying much attention to this fact.

“That’s very generous of you, Supergirl. I will make a phone call, in order to obtain them as soon as possible, right after we’ll have processed Wonder Woman.” Another Matron stood ready to escort her to a little cell, where she was supposed to spend most of her time, until their trial was scheduled to begin.

“Would you follow me, Supergirl?” She was about to respond to the request, when the first Matron remarked.

“Supergirl, you should know, that all of us believe, that you and Wonder Woman are innocent. We’ve to treat you like anyone else, but everybody here will interpret our regulations as far as possible in your favor. So if you’ve some wishes...”

“We appreciate this, Mam.” Kara replied politely, but did not make a wish.

“You are welcome, Supergirl.” The matron replied, “we rarely have the opportunity to meet someone as popular as you. May I ask a personal favor?”

“Sure, what is it?” Kara asked.

“May I take a Polaroid of you, which you can sign as an autograph?”

“No problem,” Kara replied, “take it.”

“No I’ll come and see you in your cell as soon as the key for your *handcuffs* will arrive. Maybe you can pose for me with these *cuffs* on and a collar. This will make a big impression on my friends.”

“I don’t know,” Kara rejected the proposal. “Wonder Woman and I are here, because we respect the law and not to pose as models for photo shootings.”

“Please do me the favor, Supergirl, I will hurry to get those key and release you immediately afterwards.” She begged. “It’s just for private use. I will not sell it or show it to a reporter, I promise.”

“Okay, I’ll do it,” Kara answered generously, “but don’t make a show from it.”

“Thank you very much, Supergirl, I will come to you as soon as possible.” After this talk Kara was led away.

Only then Diana, who was still *handcuffed* and impatient to get rid of her ‘jewelry’, was processed. They took away her lasso, her tiara and also wanted to remove her “indestructible bracelets”, which turned out to be impossible.

“Listen, Ladies,” she explained, “these bracelets are irremovable, they are part of my heritage. It was even in the newspapers. You can try and I won’t hinder you, but it’s impossible. However I would appreciate if you could remove the *bracelets* your colleague has provided me with, or is there a problem with the key, too?” Diana replied and extended her joined wrists in order to substantiate her request.

“No, as far as I know a standard key will fit to those. They go back to the third district. Sargent Riker from there is here, call him to take them with him. He can assist us anyway,” she answered, ignoring Diana’s suggestively extended wrists. But Sargent Riker showed up a few minutes later and wanted to release Diana.

“It’s a pleasure for me to release you Wonder Woman,” he said gallantly, “I wish we would have met under more favorable circumstances.” He was already about to unlock Diana’s *restraints*, when another female guard intervened. She was carrying, what seemed to be a pair of ordinary *handcuffs* with an absurdly long connecting *chain*, about one foot in length.

“Sargent Riker, we have strict order to keep Wonder Woman under restraint. She must not be unrestrained at any time. However we found these,” she announced, “and they are almost not restriction at all, don’t you agree?”

“Very well,” replied Sargent Riker a little bit bugged, “I was just about to remove our *handcuffs* from your guest, if you don’t mind. Afterwards you can do with her, what you have to do.”

“You don’t understand, Sargent Riker. Wonder Woman must not be unrestrained. Therefore you have to put those on her, before you remove yours.” Diana reacted quickly and turned to the matron.

“Why can’t you do it?” She asked extending her hands in her direction.

“No, this must be done by a man. My instructions are very specific about it. Sargent Riker, would you...” Diana under-

stood, that this was a conspiracy, in which Sargent Riker was not involved.

He shook his head, but took the long *chain cuffs* and clicked them on Diana's wrists – not too tight, but with the experience of an arresting officer who knew exactly which degree of snugness was necessary in order to prevent the arrestant from slipping the *steel circlets* off. He set their double locks, before he unlocked the *cuffs*, Diana had worn for half a day.

The new *cuffs* were indeed no restriction at all. Diana could move almost, as if they were not present. However, applied by a man, they prevented reliably, that her powers returned, and someone, who wanted her out of the way knew this. She had to warn Kara. Kara with her unconstrained powers was the only one, who could do something, and most likely there was something in store for her too.

Unaware of this Kara sat on the cot of her cell and was bored. She was not used to be restrained. Almost unconsciously she began to pull on her *cuffs*. Increasing the level of power gradually, she was surprised how much those took without showing the slightest sign of bending.

Suddenly she realized, that any earth-material she knew should have been crushed under the current assault of Kryptonian power, only Kryptonian super metal was so strong. However these *cuffs* were definitely not forged from the green glowing Kryptonian super metal she knew very well. They were different.

She almost panicked and used all her strength in order to tear her hands apart.

In this environment even Kryptonian super metal could not resist this level of power. But the *circlets*, which surrounded the outline of her wrists perfectly like a second skin did neither bend nor did the short *chain* connecting them lengthen.

Kara panicked. Although she knew, that this would be impossible, considering the smooth fit, she desperately tried to slip her hands out of *circlets*. She had to get those off. But all, she gained, was pain from the unknown material, which resisted her Kryptonian powers as easy as simple steel defeated human ones.

“Shit,” Kara thought, “I have worn these things like expensive bracelets, and somewhere someone's laughing about me, because he or she knows's, that I am helpless like a ten year old human girl.” She was of course not that helpless. She focused her heat vision on the connecting *chain* until it glowed white and applied all her strength, again without success.

However, although she was considerably hampered, she was still able to fly, and those bars in front of her cell would not stop her. With her X-ray vision she localized Diana one cell block away. Diana ran around in her cell in circles like a captured cougar. The *chain* of her long *chain cuffs* dangled between her wrists. Occasionally the Amazon grabbed this *chain* and pulled on it, but nothing happened.

“Those must have been applied by a man,” concluded Kara. She realized, that someone had set them up. Kara estimated the distances. Then she kicked the gate out of its fixing, ran to Diana's cell

too fast for a human eye to notice and did the same to the gate barring Diana's cell.

"It finally sunk in, I thought you would never come," Diana greeted her relieved. "Could you please?" She extended her wrist with the connecting *chain* towards Diana. Then she realized, that Kara wore *handcuffs* as well. "You, too?"

"No, that's a different story." The Kryptonian grabbed the *chain* connecting Diana's *handcuffs* with her joined hands and ripped it apart like straw. A flood of power emanated through Diana's body.

"That's better," she said and snapped the remaining *cuff bracelets* from her wrists. "Much better!" Kara clenched her fists within their confinement.

"May I help you?" Diana asked.

"You may try. Every help is welcome. But I did my best already – and failed." The Amazom took hold on the *circlets* and together they tried to pull them apart. The unknown material, however, was not very impressed and resisted the combined strength of both super-heroines without revealing a potential weakness.

"Thanks for trying, Diana," Kara finally said, "I still can't believe how this is possible, too, but obviously this is beyond our powers. However, maybe you know one, who might be able to tear those apart later, maybe on Paradise Island?"

"I'm sorry, but no one on Themyscira is stronger than me," Diana replied. "Actually, that's a REALLY tough piece of jewelry you've acquired, almost like the weapons of the Gods," she muttered. "It might be one of Hephaestus' works."

"Whatever," Kara replied pragmati-

cally, "I can deal with those bracelets later. We should make our way to the roof and fly away, before they start to shoot at us." When she saw Diana's questioning look, she added. "I don't want, that someone innocent get's hurt."

"You may leave, but I need my Lasso of Truth and my Tiara. They are irreplaceable," Diana insisted. Kara sighed.

"Okay, I will help you," she offered. Together the two super-heroines managed to reach the safe in which the prisoners' belongings were stored in almost no time, They opened it by force and picked Diana's stuff up. Kara picked up also, what looked like a lockable, massive *steel* collar with four rings equally distributed along its circumference.

"I guess, that's the one they wanted to use on me," she thought. Kara looked at the black *cuffs* she had not been able to get rid of. "Maybe, it contains another surprise?" She mused and packed it into an empty paperback someone might have used to carry his lunch packet and left on the desk. Every hint could be useful.

"What do you want with this thing?" Diana asked. "It might be a tracking device," she warned her fellow heroine.

"I know," the Kryptonian replied, "but it may also be a trace to the ones who set this trap for us. I think, I can handle it." Only two guards blocked their way and were quickly and unbloody disabled. Once they had reached the roof the two super-heroines said farewell to each other and flew away in different directions.

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Chapter 2

Lessons

Two days later someone knocked at Barbara Gordon's apartment door. Barbara, a police officer, had just finished the morning shift. She was commissioner Gordon's daughter and, when she was not on duty, better known as Batgirl, another caped heroine, of Gotham City.

So far she had managed to hide her identity. Although not equipped with superpowers, the blonde beauty had earned herself great merits in crime fighting and was undisputedly considered to be the female counterpart of Batman, she knew well and had frequently cooperated with.

More than a few believed and gossip added considerably to it, that there was a romantic relation between them. Although she had not told anybody about it, Barbara was not disaffected. However up to now this had not happened.

She had met Supergirl a few years ago. They had fought together and liked each other at once. In the meantime Barbara and Kara had become close friends.

"Babs it's me. I have a problem," a by

now familiar voice whispered.

"Kara?" Barbara opened the door and a caped figure with sunglasses sneaked in.

"Kara, what to hell did you do?" She asked. "The news is full of your's and Diana's escape from the district prison. How could you be so stupid?" The raincape clad figure did not answer immediately, but took a seat in an armchair. She pushed her sunglasses upwards. Barbara noticed a gentle metallic jingle during the move, but did not pay attention to it.

"It was a setup, Babs," the blonde woman explained. "Someone has put false charges together in order to take me and Diana out of the game." Barbara nodded.

"Which game?" She asked.

"I've no idea, Babs. I just know, that someone made a damned big effort presumably in order to get Diana and me out of the way. But I don't know from what yet. Right now I need a hiding place and help in a delicate matter. Nobody knows, that you are Batgirl and that we know each other, so no one will look for me

here – if that’s okay with you, of course.”

“You know, that as a police officer it’s my duty to put you under arrest?” Barbara asked, but her voice revealed, that she wasn’t serious about and Kara did not respond to it, she had another problem.

“Babs, I REALLY need your help,” she pleaded. “You are a good lock picker?”

“Well, that me be judged by others, but, as you know, I managed to open one or another lock, which was considered to be quite secure,” was the dry reply.

“Can you open these?” She clumsily opened her rain coat, revealing her famous costume and the pair of black *handcuffs*, which still decorated her wrists.

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“You are *handcuffed*, Kara?” Barbara stared at the Kryptonian’s hands disbelieving. “Why don’t you rip them apart?”

“I don’t know, what these *bracelets* are made from, Babs, but I have spend the last two days, trying everything I could think of to get rid of them. As you see, without success,” Kara explained.

“You still have your powers? I mean it’s nothing like Kryptonite the staff, which makes you Kryptonians more or less human?” Barbara asked the obvious.

“No, I can fly, snap steel, burn anything with my heat vision, Babs. I can do everything, but I can’t get rid of these damned *bracelets*.” She tugged on them for emphasis. “You are my last hope.”

“If YOU cannot open those, why do you think, I might be able to help you?”

“Because these *bracelets* have mechanical locks. Do you see the key hole on the side of the *cuff*?” Raising both hands she gave Barbara a close look at them.

“Yeah,” Barbara agreed. The orifice at it’s base was tiny and had an unusual form, but it was definitely a key hole.

“Well, I remember, that the key, which fits to these locks looked like a little safe key – I saw it shortly, when the officer, who has put them on me, removed it from it’s keyhole. Therefore I am absolutely sure, that they can be unlocked with this particular key.” Batgirl agreed. This was a reasonable conclusion.

“Why did you allow anyone to *shackle* you with these high-tech *cuffs* at all?” Barbara questioned in a different direction.

“Arrogance, Babs,” Kara admitted, “pure arrogance. I thought I could rip them off any time I wished. I have worn them for show, when I was arrested and when I met the judge. Believe it or not. I was very careful in order not to damage them. It took damned long, ’till I realized, that I had been a prisoner of these things in reality and now I’m stuck with them.”

“You are still too credulous, Kara,” Barbara reprimanded her friend. “When will you learn to distrust foreign people?”

“I know, Babs, I know,” Kara replied. “However, can you open them?”

“Well, if there is a mechanical lock, it can be opened. I will fetch my picks and we will see.” She went to a closet, returned with an extensive collection of lock-picks and started to work on them.

“You will be free soon,” Barbara an-

nounced confidently, but after a series of unsuccessful attempts her confidence dwindled rapidly and after she had spend the better part of the afternoon with them, it had completely faded away.

While Barbara worked on the locks, Kara, who was condemned to watch, used the time to tell her friend in detail, what had happened from her arrest until then. But the elaborate effort did not pay off.

“Kara, I am REALLY sorry to disappoint you, but I fear, I can’t help you,” Barbara finally had to admit. “To open these locks is beyond my capabilities.”

“Shit!” was Kara’s reply, which was very unusual for the Kryptonian who attached a lot of importance to her personal manners. “Thanks anyway, Babs” she added in an effort to coat her feelings. “However, do you know ANYONE, who might be able to do it?” She looked desperate. “It’s only... well, I don’t want to wear them for the rest of my life.”

“You mean, you need someone who’s better in lock picking than me?”

“Yeah, Babs, no pun intended. I need someone, who can open these lousy *bracelets*. They are not really fashionable.” She smiled in an attempt to pretend coolness. Barbara gave her a knowing – she could imagine, how Kara felt right now.

“Okay, Babs, to be honest, I feel horribly already. I have not even been able to change my dress. I must smell awfully.”

“THAT’s something we can change,” Barbara grinned at her, “but seriously, the locks of those *cuffs* are a completely different matter. Those could easily serve

as first price in any lock-picking contest. That’s my professional opinion.”

“You mean I should offer them as the first price? Be serious!” Kara rejected the implicit proposition immediately.

“Counter question: Do you want yourself to be adressed in the news as ‘Bondagegirl?’” Kara did not react.

“Babs, whoever did this to me – and I don’t mean that colleagues of yours, who actually applied them – has presumably made sure, that I can’t get my hands on the key,” she argued. “But someone on this world must have made these *hand-cuffs* and this guy should also be able to remove them. Therefore we have to find out, what this strange metal is and how it can be forged. Actually Diana mentioned a guy named Hephaestus, who might be able to do it, before we separated.”

“That’s the ancient Greek God of blacksmiths and metallurgy. I don’t think he runs a shop around the corner.”

“Shit, Babs, it was just an idea.” She tugged on the connecting *chain* of ‘her’ *wristlets*. “Look, I can still do many things with my hands linked like this, but I can definitely not appear in public like this. There are too many, who’ll need me.”

“Actually your thought might not be completely wrong,” Barbara replied. “I know a metallurgist at Gotham University. He should be interested in your *cuffs*, and, if he does not know how to open them, we still can ask Batman. Usually he might have even better connections.”

“Batman will try to help me, but he will joke about me,” Kara objected. “Can

your metallurgist keep a secret?”

“Well, I think, you don’t will have to mention your real name, respectively reveal your identity. It’s just a promising try. However, do you want them off?”

“Okay, it’s at least a glimpse of hope,” Kara admitted. She raised herself, “we won’t know, if we don’t try. Let’s do it.”

“Not so fast, Kara. It will take me a few days to get an appointment,” Barbara curbed Kara’s high spirit. “Right now you need a shower and new clothing. Your escape is still in the news, although it was not mentioned, you escaped *handcuffed*.”

“Presumably no one believes, that I cannot not take them off,” Kara mused. “I would not have believed it two days ago.”

“I think, you don’t care about corrosion on your *bracelets*?” Barbara asked.

“You bet, but I can’t take of the upper part of my suit,” Kara who understood Barbara’s line of thought objected.

“Well, a pair of scissors will do!” Barbara nevertheless stated with a grin.

“And what shall I wear afterwards?” Kara was not fond of her proposal.

“Well, I have a tank top and a pinafore dress, not the latest fashion, but they should fit you, too,” she came up with a practical solution. “If the problem will be solved, I assume, you have a spare suit?”

“Of course.” So Kara stripped off her trousers and Barbara made short work of the upper part of her suit and her bra.

“Now you are ready to use the shower,” she announced. When Kara disappeared in the cubicle, Barbara fetched the paper bag, she had brought with her.

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“What’s in the bag?” She asked loud enough, that Kara could hear it inside the cubicle despite the running shower.

“The collar from the prison safe, I told you about,” Kara answered. She had to raise her voice to drown the shower.

“But there is nothing peculiar about it,” she explained her most recent findings. “No marks no scratches, nothing. It’s also not a tracking device – I’ve checked this. It’s just a lockable metal collar with three rings attached. The key works. The collar feels a little bit strange, but it’s not a Kryptonite alloy – I mean, I can fly and don’t feel weak if I touch it.”

“That’s strange,” Barbara objected, “if it was a setup, it should have a purpose.” The shower stopped. Kara dried herself, a little bit hampered by the *cuffs*, but she did not call for assistance. When she reappeared, wearing her underpants and a towel wrapped around her breasts. Barbara awaited her with the collar at hand.

“Let’s make an experiment,” she suggested literally waving it into her view.

“What do you mean?” Kara asked.

“As I said, if the two of you fell victim to a trap and this collar was a part of it, it must have had some function. Are you sure, that it is not something extraordinary which has some unknown powers?”

“Of course I am,” Kara replied. “I’ve teared off one of the metal rings with two fingers. It’s simple human made *steel*. I’m sure, I can break that collar into two parts with my hands even while *handcuffed*.”

“That’s why we will make the experiment,” Barbara insisted. “Whoever set up the trap, has left nothing to chance. I bet, you’ve been lucky to have escaped at all. We’ve to know, what this collar is about.”

“I believe by now, that the matron just wanted to make a photo of me in it, for what reason ever,” Kara ascertained.

“Please, lower your hands and step through your *cuffs*,” Barbara demanded.

“What for?” Kara was still dubious.

But Batgirl was persistent: “Just do it.”

“Okay...” The towel fell down and revealed two magnificently well-formed breasts. Kara stepped through the *cuffs* and faced Barbara with her hands fixed now behind her back. Her breasts were forced outward by the enforced posture. She visibly disliked it, but bent her head a little to allow Barbara to affix the collar. It snapped shut with a click, and Barbara turned and removed the sticking key.

“Do you feel something?” She inquired. The Kryptonian shook her head.

“Negative – it’s just a necklace.”

“Okay, I’ll fetch something. Don’t move.” With these words she disappeared towards her bedroom and returned with a piece of *chain* and two locks.

“These are two simple brass padlocks. I think you can squeeze them between two fingers?” she asked suggestively.

“I should be able to do this,” Kara replied confidently. “What do you want?”

“Well, I’m going to use them to affix your *bracelets* to this collar by means of an ordinary piece of light *steel chain*.” Barbara announced. She used one padlock to con-

nected the piece of *chain* to the *ring* on the back of Kara’s collar, so that it dangled along her spine. Then she wrought the other end of this *chain* around the one between ‘Kara’s’ *handcuffs* and locked it there by means of the second padlock.

“May I ask, what’s the purpose of this?” Kara’s angry voice revealed, that she saw no sense in Barbara’s actions.

“Try to get your hands back to the front.” Kara did, what she was expected to do, or rather she tried to do so. But her hands were caught back by a *chain*, she would have been able to rip apart a few minutes ago. She almost panicked.

“I can’t, Babs, I simply can’t,” she almost yelled, trying desperately to get her *cuffs* loose from the *chain*, without success.

“Calm down, Kara. Try to enlighten this candle with your heat vision.” She focused on one of the decorative lights on Barbara’s table. It did not work either.

“What about your X-ray-vision, can you look through the wall?” She tried to penetrate it and shook her head.

“Can you fly?” Barbara asked.

“Negative.” She was not able to lift off.

“So you are disabled like Diana, once she was *handcuffed*.” Barbara concluded.

“Shit,” Kara used the word Barbara had never heard from her before the third time. “I must have been very stupid, Babs. This collar was the real trap.”

“No, Kara,” Barbara replied generously, “just too credulous. This is the first lesson: Don’t trust foreign people.”

“Okay lesson understood,” the Kryptonian replied meekly. She yanked on the

chain. “What to hell do you think is this thing, it feels a little bit cold, but not like Kryptonite. Yet I’m almost powerless.”

“You can sense Kryptonite, from a few feet away?” Barbara asked knowingly.

“Of course, except if it’s radiation is shielded by lead or depleted Uranium, something very dense and heavy.”

“But you did not feel anything like it, while you carried this collar around?”

“Hell no, I would not have let you put it around my throat, if I would have suspected it contained some Kryptonite.”

“That’s presumably the point. I think this collar is a kind of trap for snotnosed Kryptonians made by Luthor Corp., but that’s pure speculation, I should not talk about things I don’t understand.”

“No, Babs, go ahead, you may well be on the right track,” Kara encouraged her.

“My theory is, that it is made from Wolfram carbide, or something similar, hard and dense and that it contains only a small fraction of Kryptonite which is arranged, so that it’s radiation mainly distributes to the inside, a fraction of Kryptonite, which is so tiny, that you cannot sense it and that it is only effective in reducing your powers, when it’s locked onto your throat. Maybe closing it around your throat contributes to focusing it’s radiation to a precisely determined level.”

“Which is the case now. That makes sense.” She tried to reach the collar with her hands, but could not do so. Angrily she strained against her *restraints*.

“Babs, would you be so kind, to take this collar off?” She asked and pulled on it. “It’s enough, that I have to face the indignity to be *handcuffed*.” Barbara smiled.

“Lesson number two, buddy: Don’t trust friends you recently played a joke on.” Kara was immediately on full alert.

“But that was half a year ago,” she objected immediately. “And you were able to free yourself after all in a few minutes.”

“So you still know what I mean,” Barbara stated with a sinister smile.

“Damned, Batgirl, you insisted, that you could do everything on your own.”

“Kitty-Cat had fixed me up with three pairs of *bat-cuffs*, legs and feet, enforced by thumb and toe *cuffs*, a perfect *steel* hog-tie. I was almost naked. You bent down and asked, if I was okay, and then flew away.”

“Well you said ‘yes’, ‘yes’ meant you did not want my help. Besides, there was nobody around, who could harm you.”

“No, ‘yes’ meant I was not in immediate danger. It would have cost you a snap of your fingers to rip those *fetters* apart.”

“But this would have destroyed your precious *bat-cuffs*. You were not in danger, and your...” Kara tried to argue.

“Don’t try to talk yourself out of it. You left me *chained* up on purpose. Now it will be your turn,” Barbara cut her speech off. She produced a *chain leash* and fixed it to the front ring of Kara’s collar.

Barbara was merciless: “Take off your underpants,” she demanded. “Kitty-Cat had removed mine as well.” Kara gulped.

“WHAT?” Kara exclaimed angrily.

“You heard, what I said!”

Reluctantly Kara wriggled herself out of her underpants. "Satisfied?"

"Almost." Barbara had fetched a strange ensemble of black leather straps with shiny *steel* buckles and *rings*.

"What's that?" Kara had no idea.

"It's called a leather harness."

"Did you wear it?" Kara asked.

"I once had a boy-friend who liked to see me in this, however it will suit you even better." Barbara began buckling the whole ensemble onto Kara's naked body, while the temporarily powerless superheroine watched the ceiling, but did offer neither physical nor verbal resistance.

"Are you finally ready?" She asked, when Barbara had finished her artwork.

"All-most, you look splendid. Do you want to use the mirror in my bedroom?"

"Do I have a choice?" Kara asked.

"No," Barbara tugged on the leash and led her to her own bedroom. A mirror of a man's height allowed her to appraise the results of Barbara's efforts. A small *steel ring* adored her throat directly under the *collar*, which had taken her powers away.

From this emanated two leather strips, which ended in two *steel rings* centered around her bare nipples, which were additionally connected by a horizontal strip. They were also supported by another tight fitting horizontal strip, which disappeared behind her back.

Two other buckled straps connected them to a third one centered on her crotch, which was in turn held in place by crotch strap. Most of the straps were obviously buckled and Barbara had adjusted

them in order to achieve a tight fit.

To her chagrin Kara noted also, that Barbara had fitted at least all visible buckles within the reach of her hands with small brass-locks denying them to open any of them, as long as she was in the weakened state imposed by the collar.

"Did you wear this thing often?" Kara asked, referring to the leather harness.

"Every night we were together."

"And did you also wear *handcuffs*, like me?" She wriggled them around her hips.

"Usually two pairs" Barbara replied, "one for my wrists and the other for my elbows – sometimes a pair of *leg-irons* too."

"Babs you are pretty kinky," Kara stated. "What has appened to this guy?"

"He's dead," Barbara replied with a broken voice. "He was shot down on duty three years ago, before I became Batgirl and before we got to know each other."

"I am sorry for you," Kara expressed sympathie. "Do you still miss him?"

"Yes, Kara, I miss him. I miss him every day," She replied. "With two pairs of *cuffs* on your arms, you can hardly use lock picks, and the pair on your elbows is completely inaccessible. Shall I show you?"

"I am not in a position to stop you." Kara understood, that this was more than a little revenge. Barbara needed someone to talk about her losses. So she did not resist and even squeezed her elbows together when Barbara applied the second pair of standard *handcuffs* to them.

"That's better than a push up bra?"

"I can see it," Kara replied, regarding her truely impressive image in the mirror.

“Do you want to try the *leg-irons* too?”

“I’ve never worn ones,” Kara replied. She sat down on Babara’s bed, scooted backwards and attracted her legs ankles together. Barbara took the mentioned set of *leg-irons* out of her toy box and clicked the ratchets down on Kara’s ankles.

“How is it? Move around.” Kara complied, raised herself and took a few steps.

“Well, it’s... restrictive. Is that, what you’ve done, when the two of you were together?” She asked and Barbara nodded.

“And you liked to be restricted like this, be under someone else’s control?”

“Only when it was him. I wish I could forget him!” There was an infinite amount of sadness in Batgirl’s voice.

“Come to me, Babs, give me your hand,” Kara prompted like a mother. She reached out around her hips and Barbara took her hand, which was still confined within the grip of a *cuff* behind her back.

“We are, what we are through the people we love and hate, the ones, who form us, Babs,” she tried to explain her fellow-heroine with the wisdom of a long life.

“Nobody is alone on this world and when a beloved one dies, a piece of him or her remains in the heart of the bereaved. My father was assassinated, when I was a young girl. He was the best father you can imagine and, when he died, my heart broke. It took years ’till I was able to talk about it. But my father’s thoughts and idea’s are still in my head and I’m much more than I would have been, if he would have never existed, Babs. In this

sense his spirit is still with me and, although there was so much he couldn’t teach me anymore, I am glad and thankful, that he lived and that I was granted to have known him. Don’t try to forget the ones you’ve lost, try to preserve what they gave you. Forgetting is no solution. It also means loosing, what you gathered from them.” Barbara kept quite for a while holding Kara’s hand.

“How old are you Kara?” She finally asked, impressed by her friends speech.

“Much older than you can imagine, Babs. Kryptonians have a much longer natural live-span than humans, and our technology allows us to prolongate that even further,” Kara explained evasively.

“Then you have experienced all this?”

“More tha a hundred times, Babs. But this did not prevent me to fall victim to your trap and end up as your personal slave,” she said indicating her *restraints*.

“I can take everything off,” her fellow heroine offered, but relativated her offer immediatly, “except for those very special *handcuffs* on your wrists, of course.”

“No, I deserve to wear these things,” Kara replied, “and I can bear them ’till tomorrow. This will remind me in the future not to underestimate humans again.”

So Kara spent the night in the *restraints* Barbara had imposed on her and was only freed in the morning, except for the mysterious *handcuffs*, the two heroines had no means to remove at all, yet.

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Chapter 3

Aphrodite's Bracelets

"High Kara, I'm glad, you could come," Barbara greeted her fellow heroine a few days later. The blond beauty was casually dressed and had a fashionable jacket with empty sleeves wrapped around her upper body. She took it off, when she entered Barbara's apartment.

"I'm glad, that nothing serious has happened," I don't want to appear on the screen like this," Kara said, indicating the *chain* between her still *braceleted* wrists.

"Well, I'm confident, you'll get rid of those today," Barbara replied, "our appointment with Dr. Bowman – you remember the material science expert I told you about? – is scheduled for six PM, today. We'll meet him in his office."

"What do you mean?" Kara asked. "We should visit him in his office with me in these *handcuffs*?" She seemed to be upset. "No way, Babs. I've a reputation to defend. I thought he will visit us."

"Kara, we HAVE TO visit him," Barbara argued. "Nobody can change this. The machinery, which is necessary to cut 'your'

bracelets off, is simply too big for him to carry around. He leaves off work at 17.30 PM and will be alone with us in the laboratory afterwards. What else do you want?"

"Okay, this will do," Kara conceded relieved, "what did you tell him about, how this happened?" Nervously she tugged on the *chain* between her wrists.

"I told him, you are a super-kinky super-heroine in need of assistance after a sex-accident," Barbara replied dryly.

"WHAT?" Kara yelled almost.

"I was just joking," Barbara hurried to explain, when she saw the expression in her fellow heroine's face. "You Kryptonians don't have any sense of humor."

"Not in this matter." She took a deep breath. "What did you REALLY tell him?"

"I told him simply, that a friend gave those to you, who also does not know, who really gave them to him. You've worn them on a party and lost the key, and that's where I got involved," her friend replied. "It may not be the smartest cover-story, but it's at least not com-

pletely ridiculous. Is that okay with you?"

"I think it will do," Kara admitted.

"Good. Then there's only one little problem: I know, that they have a security gate at the institute now, because repeatedly equipment has been stolen."

"You mean, I'll nevertheless have to show off these '*bracelets*' there?" Kara asked, indicating 'her' *wrist restraints*.

"You'll have to declare them as your personal property, when we enter the building in order to keep them when we leave it," Barbara explained. "I knew you wouldn't like it, but this is the way it is."

"Great!" As expected, Kara was anything, but enthusiastic about it.

"Do you want them off - 'yes' or 'no'?"

"Of course," Kara gave up resistance.

"Then let's go." The heroines reached the building without being noticed.



The security man at the gate was baffled, when Kara declared her *handcuffs* as a "pair of matching *bracelets*", but he signed for it with a grin and asked Kara, if she had a friend, which brought him a black look from the hampered super-heroine.

"Hi, Dr. Bowman," Barbara greeted the scientist, an elderly man dressed in a white lab coat, who already awaited them. "Linda, that's Dr. Bowman - he was very helpful to us in the Sally-Jones-case - and Dr. Bowman, this is my friend Linda, to whom this really strange misadventure with the *bracelets* has happened."

"High, Linda," Naturally Kara had to return his handshake with both hands.

"Nice *bracelets*," he commented Kara's 'jewelry', "and you put them on yourself?"

"I am ashamed to admit it, Dr. Bowman. They were given to me by a friend as a kind of party joke," Kara declared in accordance with her cover-story. "I tried them on, but after the party the key, I had stored in my purse, was gone and..."

"... now you were stuck with those," the old scientist finished her sentence.

"Well, that's actually the short version of the story," Kara smiled at him.

"Is there a longer one?" He asked.

"Yes. My friends and I tried everything, we could imagine, to get them off. Everyone was willing to help me. They started with a bolt cutter and ended with a diamond coated hacksaw. They even tried an angle grinder, but if you take a close look, they did not even manage to scratch this damned *chain*, that keeps me captive." She gave him the opportunity to convince himself about this fact.

"Barbara suggested to visit you, Dr. Bowman, and actually you are my last hope already," she continued. "Up to now I did not have to show up in public, but, Dr. Bowman, I would rather die than run around with these things on my hands. I never did anything wrong." She made it sound very desperately, and her well prepared speech achieved its goal to distract him from asking further questions.

"Well, Linda, there are materials, that are quite tough beyond common expectations, but, that the angle grinder and a diamond coated saw did not leave a mark on those *bracelets*, is not a good sign."

“So you can’t help?” The disappointment adhering to these words was real.

“I did not say so, Linda,” Dr. Bowman replied evasively. “But it doesn’t look very good. We’ve a hydraulic cutting device, much stronger than a bolt cutter, a high pressure water beam, a plasma torch and a high energy laser for these purposes, and we’ll try all of them if necessary. There are some rare materials, which can withstand a diamond coated sawblade for some time, but I don’t know about anything, which would not suffered a scratch from it, maybe with one exception. Are you sure, the saw was diamond coated?”

“At least they said so.” Kara replied.

“Well let’s try,” Dr. Bowman suggested. “Would you come with me? These machines cannot be carried around.” They tried everything he mentioned and a few other methods without success.

The hydraulic cutting tool was even damaged – the cermit blades, that ought to cut the tiny *chain* like butter according to Dr. Bowman, were crushed into pieces.

Knowing, that those tools were quite expensive, Barbara thought the Doctor would be angry about this, but actually Dr. Bowman didn’t care. He was truly fascinated, almost excited by the scientific paradox, that ‘Kara’s’ *bracelets* had not suffered any marks from these attempts.

“Linda, I am sorry, but your *handcuffs* – I may call them *handcuffs*?” He began.

“Yes, of course, as that’s precisely, what they are,” Kara admitted dryly.

“Well Linda, those *handcuffs* have defeated anything known to material sci-

ence today for disrupting crystal structures, except for a nuclear explosion.”

“So there is no realistic hope, that I will ever get rid of these,” Kara exclaimed truly shocked by his judgement.

“Unfortunately not, Linda,” he declared. “No one, I know, could help you. Maybe Superman or Supergirl can rip them apart, but currently human science has no means to achieve this. I’m sorry, that I’ve to tell you that, but it would’nt be the truth to tell you anything else.”

“Very well, Dr. Bowmann. Thanks for your efforts anyway.” Kara hardly managed to hide her disappointment. She had expected much more from this appointment and just wanted to leave now.

“Linda, I know, you are desperate now, and therefore I don’t know, if I can dare to ask it,” the old man visibly tried to choose his words carefully, “but for science this is a truly great discovery,…”

“No, Dr. Bowmann,” Kara interrupted him harshly. “I DON’T want to become an exhibit in seminar rooms. I guess I somehow have to come to terms with these *bracelets* and I would appreciate, if you could forget about this discovery.”

“You are on the wrong track, Linda,” Dr. Bowman objected hauntingly. “I might not be able to remove them from your wrists, but I might be able to find out something about their origin, which in turn might help you in the near future.”

“How?” The short question revealed to Barbara that her fellow heroine was desperate enough to grasp at straws.

“Well, we have not only cutting tools

here but also a lot of instruments for investigations..." Dr. Bowman began.

"If you don't know this material, how do you want to find something out about its origins?" Kara asked logically. "No, thanks, Dr. Bowman, I do not want to become part of an experiment either."

"But I might have seen precisely this material before," Dr. Bowman admitted.

"Where, Dr. Bowman?" Suddenly he had attracted Kara's full attention.

"I've to convince myself, first, ladies." Kara sighed. She would not get rid of 'her' *bracelets*, but what could she lose?

"Okay, what do I have to do, Dr. Bowman?" She asked not quite convinced.

"Place your hands on this X-ray device over there, with the *chain* directly over the hole." She did what he requested.

"That way?" She had placed the *chain* above the middle of the opening.

"Perfectly," the old man was pleased. "I'll fetch a view lead sows for your protection 'till the tube is heated up."

"That's not necessary." Kara almost bit on her tongue. He could not know, that her Kryptonian physiology was resistant to X-rays far beyond the level this simple device might be able to produce.

"Oh dear, believe me it is, the radiation is quite strong, not comparable to a medical X-ray device. I have to insist on it." With visible effort he placed a few of the heavy sows in front of Kara's breast and she endured it quietly. Then he activated the device. It took only a view minutes to take some digital X-ray pictures.

"That's it," he muttered, "*Adamant*."

The second sample I've got to see after forty years." Kara had raised herself and took a look at his computer screen.

"But, that's just a picture of the middle link of this *chain*," she stated. "Your X-ray image looks like a normal picture."

"Right," Dr. Bowman replied, "but an X-ray image must not look that way. If it were a conventional material we would see the crystal structure. Not the atoms themselves, but a regular scattering pattern. But this material simply absorbs everything, as if it would be a massive block of unstructured ultra-dense nuclear matter. There are no separated atomic nuclei, Linda. According to the books this kind of matter cannot exist under normal conditions. That's definitely *Adamant* – no other material shows this property."

"I beg your pardon," Kara replied excitedly, "I've never heard about this *Adamant*. But since you seem to know it, can your knowledge somehow help us to remove those *bracelets* from my wrists?" Dr. Bowman shook his head slowly.

"Unfortunately not, Linda. Nothing, I know, can cut or even weaken *Adamant*."

"Great!" Kara exclaimed. "But what to hell is it? You said, you've seen it before?"

"Yes, it was in London forty years ago. It was the most exciting time of my life."

"And, who made it?" Kara asked.

"I don't know," he replied, "we were told, that it had been excavated from an ancient place. It was a single bracelet similar to yours, but one which could be opened and closed easily without a key."

"Where did it come from?" Kara was

persistent. "It's important, Dr. Bowman!"

"It was found in Athens. Hephaestus' Temple is one of the best preserved antique buildings. Using ultrasonic sound British archaeologists had found a small cavity under the building much older than the building itself, and inside this cavity they found this single bracelet and nothing more. Well, that's at least, what we were told, when it was given to us."

"DIANA." Barbara, who had observed and listened quietly, exclaimed. "Diana said something about Hephaestus."

"Yes," Kara replied, the *chain* connecting 'her' *bracelets* was taut, but defeated the incredible high tension easily. "Dr. Bowman, what is this *Adamant*?"

"A mythological material. According to 'Prometheus bound', which is an ancient tragedy attributed to Aeschylus, it was the material the Greek God Hephaestus used to *chain* the titan Prometheus to a Caucasian mountain."

"That's just an old fairy tale. What is it in reality, Dr. Bowman?" Kara inquired.

"We still don't know. This bracelet was brought to London, although this was forbidden by Greek laws, and extensively investigated there in total secrecy. I had done some work on super-strong materials. Under the condition, not to talk to anybody about it – it was during the cold war, ladies – I got access to it. However the investigations had to be closed without results, except, that the material, it was made from, dwarfs everything we can create up to now." He sighed.

"Those data, we got, were never pub-

lished. This stuff is much more rigid and much tougher than everything, I've ever seen or investigated, orders of magnitude beyond everything, we can create today – we couldn't even probe it to its limits – and the stuff absorbs high intensity X-rays without heating up like nothing else. Well that's what your... *bracelets* also do. No one knows where the energy disappears. It's only a theory, but since energy has not much mass, it might be absorbed and stored by the material itself."

"Call them *handcuffs*, Dr. Bowman," Kara replied. "If I understand it correctly, according to your judgement there's nothing, I can do to get rid of them."

"I'm sorry, Linda. But that's the way it is. I'm not even sure, if those *handcuffs* wouldn't survive a nuclear explosion."

"Great! But thanks anyway." Kara was not enthusiastic about their findings.

"Dr. Bowman," Barbara interjected, when it deemed her, that everything meaningful had been said, "you know, I'm a police officer and it's my job to investigate, how this could have happen to Linda. It would be very helpful not to say essential for my investigastions, if you would not discuss this with anyone else in particular not with your colleagues."

He smiled: "No problem, Barbara, they don't believe in *Adamant* anyway. But, although I could not help you, this was a truly exciting evening for me, ladies. I would give my right arm for talking to the guy who's forged these *bracelets*."

Kara's mood had hit rock bottom and did not improve, when the security man,

who checked them out, asked her, if he could date her in that outfit. She fixed the steel door of his office with a grim look, when they left. When he wanted to leave, he found, that someone had jammed the door unnoticed by him with a few welds.

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“That was a complete failure,” Barbara summarized their enterprise, after they had returned to her apartment.

“No, Babs,” Kara managed to surprise her, “although I was very disappointed, that I still have to wear these cursed *bracelets*, we have learned something. If it was indeed Hephaestus, who made them, we have to go to Paradise Island. If there is some knowledge about these, it can be found there. And I won't give up.”

“You have to go to Paradise Island.”

“You don't want to accompany me?”

“I've the morning shift tomorrow.”

“You let me to go alone to Paradise Island helpless like this?” Kara asked mockingly and raised her joined hands.

“You're everything else then helpless, you can fly, you can...” Barbara objected.

“Okay, I'll fly alone,” Kara conceded.

“And I should try to find out through official channels, how these *bracelets* came to Gotham city. If they really stem from Hephaestus' Temple in Athens, excavated forty years ago, how can it happen, that they appear in Gotham City today?”

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Kara was not sure, if she could reach the mythical Island of Themyscira as the Amazons themselves call Paradise Island at all. She had tried many years ago and failed. A force field of unknown nature, but beyond Kryptonian power had denied her to approach the mythical Island.

Diana had told her much later, that this was a creation of the Gods installed to keep all kinds of aliens and humans in particular away from the island and that only the Amazons and the Gods themselves of course were able to penetrate it.

However, Kara needed help in order to get rid of those *handcuffs* and the only trace led directly to the Gods, who had provided the Amazons with their powers ages ago. Since the Gods themselves were not present anymore, Paradise Island was the logical choice to start a research about anything related to them.

As far as Kara knew, neither Diana nor any other Amazon had any background knowledge about the technology of the Gods. Unlike Kara, who was a survivor of the high-tech-civilization of Krypton and had access to some technology beyond human knowledge, the Amazons were acquainted with some high-tech devices at least partially even more advanced than Kryptonian ones, but they were not familiar with the principles, according to which these actually worked.

The Gods themselves of course had mastered their technology and the proof, that it was at least partially superior to the Kryptonian one just adorned her wrists. Kara did not have have access

to much of the former Kryptonian high tech anymore, but she had a database about it and from this she knew, that those things, which held her wrists captive should be impossible to create, according to the collective knowledge of Kryptonian scientists. But a God named Hephaestus had proved long ago, that Kara's ancestors were wrong on that.

The force field shielding Paradise Island from detection by human technology as well as the intruding of foreigners, which were recognized and classified by unknown means, did not hide the Island from Kara's superior Kryptonian senses. But it had prevented her from setting her foot on Paradise Island, when she had attempted to do so a few years ago.

Being aware of its hostile nature to non-Amazonians, she approached the force field carefully in flight, expecting to be repelled like at the last occasion, which was presumably less painful if it happened at lower velocities. But to her surprise today the force field did not take care about her.

The Amazons however reacted confused and terrified. Two warriors took the newcomer immediately into custody. Kara Zor-El was treated very roughly.

"Stop, ladies, I am not an enemy. I am seeking for help," she tried to convince her guardians, who had taken her by the elbows with a power only slightly weaker than her own Kryptonian strength. Had her hands been free, she might have been able to defend herself against this assault, but human bones would have been scrunched to peaces under their grip.

"Don't you see, that I am *fettered* and helpless? I am no threat to your island." She protested against the treatment.

"You have breached the shield of Athena. You are a severe danger to our community. Are there others like you?"

"Ladies, if I would have had the intention to attack you, do you think I would have arrived *handcuffed*? I'm Kara Zor-El from Krypton. Diana knows me."

"WE don't know you. We will bring you to Hippolyte, our queen, she will decide, what to do with you. But be prepared, to be send to Tartaros, foreigner, a prison nobody has ever escaped from."

"Great!" Kara thought, "I delivered myself into the fire directly out of the frying pan." She was forced to kneel in front of Hippolyte the Amazon Queen, who looked a lot like an older, but still attractive version of Diana. She resided on a throne shaded by, what looked much like a smaller, but intact version of the ancient Greek temple, that crowned the antique urban castle of Athens in Greece.

"Let her loose," the Queen ordered. Her warriors obeyed, but stayed close by in case, Kara should try something.

"Who are you, foreigner? I was told, that you breached the Shield of Pallas Athena? This has never happened before and may be a hint of great danger to us!"

"I am Kara Zor-El from Krypton, your royal highness," Kara replied bowing her head, "I am acquainted with your daughter, Princess Diana, and I came to Paradise Island seeking for help."

"You claim to be acquainted with Di-

ana? This can be verified quickly: Philea, would you please call Diana?" She advised one of her companions, before she addressed Kara again. "You said you were seeking for help, Kara Zor-El. Yet you achieved something, no mortal ever managed to do, you breached the impregnable shield of the mighty Pallas Athena."

"I honestly don't know, why the shield did not prevent me from reaching your island, your royal highness," Kara declared, "but I can assure you, that I did not come here to do any harm to anyone – quite contrary: It's a personal problem of mine, your royal highness, for which I dare to ask for the help of your people. It's these," she extended her joined wrists. "I was *shackled* with these a few days ago, and I can't take them off."

"And you think, Amazonian power can help?" Hippolyte asked the obvious.

"No, your royal highness," Kara replied, "Diana has already tried and she failed, as I did. But in the mean time I found out, that they might have been excavated in Athens on Earth. They were presumably found in a cave under the Temple of Hephaestus forty years ago."

"Oh, that's interesting, my dear," Hippolyte stated. "Please, let me take a look at them." Kara raised herself. The warriors wanted to stop her, but Diana's mother waved them off, and Kara presented the Amazonian Queen her *handcuffs*, who eyed them very thoroughly.

"I think, you did not breach the shield of Athena, Kara Zor-El," Hippolyte said gravely, "I think, that the shield of the

mighty goddess let you pass, because you are wearing those. Kara, the jewelry, you are wearing, is very old and priceless."

"I am neither wearing them voluntarily nor do I want to keep them." Kara replied, "I came here to get rid of them."

"I am sorry, but we cannot help you, Kara," Hippolyte expressed her regrets. "Unless you manage to obtain the key, I fear, nobody can help you. Only Hephaestus is able to free you. Not even one of the other Gods is capable to do so."

"So my visit to Paradise Island will be of no avail?" Kara beared the new information with remarkable composure.

"Don't you want to know, what treasures you are wearing?" Hippolyte asked.

Kara shrugged. "Well, what are they?"

"Hephaestus was once married to Aphrodite, the Goddess of love. It was an arranged marriage. Although he adored her, she was not happy with him. I'm not entitled to judge her motives, but she began to date Ares, the God of War. Hephaestus learned about it and developed an invisible net, in which both were caught, when they slept with each other. He brought them enroled in the net to the other Gods, who laughed about them."

"That story has been told by Homer, it's famous," Kara replied knowingly.

"Yes, but what has not been told by Homer, but was told to us by the mighty Aphrodite herself, is the following," Hippolyte declared. "Hephaestus thought about punishing her for cheating on him. He forged a pair *bracelets* joined by a short *chain*. Since the Gods by their

natural powers are able to defeat anything, you can imagine, he used *Adamant*, the metal of the Gods, only Hephaestus mastered to create and forge. He actually forged three *bracelets*, a conventional jewel bracelet and the two lockable ones joined by a short *chain*, you are wearing now.”

“This sounds plausible, because I’ve heard, that the jewel bracelet you mentioned was found there, too.” Kara said.

“Well, the story goes as follows: Hephaestus showed Aphrodite the jewel bracelet, and she was very fond of it. If it’s loaded with power *Adamant* glows incomparably, it’s much more shining than highly polished silver, you should know. Since his wife was so fond of this bracelet, he asked her, if she would like a second one to have a matching pair. He pretended to need the first one as a master copy and took it away from her. A few days later he offered her a surprise and asked her to close her eyes. And it was a surprise. When she opened her eyes, she was wearing those *bracelets*, like you are wearing them now. When she found out, that even her powers could not defeat the *chain* keeping her hands together, she objected heavily, clamored and threatened to leave him, but the cuckolded God beared up and did not change his mind.”

“Well, that’s almost like I got them, except, that I saw what happened, but did not understand and allowed them to be put on me,” Kara commented the narrative. “Anyway, how did she get them off?”

“She got them off, when Hephaestus released her after seven Earth-years.

They were locked by a unique key Hephaestus carried always with him and neither the mighty Aphrodite herself nor any of the other Gods could help her to get them off. Hephaestus and Aphrodite separated in peace centuries later, but she’s never cheated on him again.”

“Is Hephaestus still alive and if where does he live now?” Kara questioned.

“Nobody know’s. He’s immortal, so he should be alive, but where is not known, at least not to us,” was the reply.

“And why do these *bracelets* no *handcuffs* let me pass the force field, you call the shield of Athena,” Kara finally asked.

“Because they are made from the ‘Metal of the Gods’, Kara. Only the Gods used this metal, usually for weapons and amour, but also other things like those you are wearing. A sword of *Adamant* cuts everything including our ‘Bracelets of Submission’ or Diana’s ‘Lasso of Truth’ and very likely your bones, too, like butter, everything except *Adamant* itself. Everyone carrying something from *Adamant* is regarded as a God or a missionary of the Gods, and the Shield of Athena will not stop him or her to reach this island.”

“Don’t you find it strange, that *handcuffs* work as a passport to your otherwise well protected Island?” Kara asked sensibly. “I mean usually the bad guys get *handcuffs* and, as humans say, those are the last, I want to invite into my living room.”

“Kara, you don’t understand, what you are wearing,” Hippolyte replied. “Those have been touched by a Goddess for a long time and *Adamant* is able

to store forms of energy beyond human comprehension. If you were human, you might benefit by a considerable prolongation of your life without aging or suffering from diseases, just because you've worn those *bracelets* for some time."

"I'm Kryptonian," Kara said. "My lifespan is much longer than humans'."

"Diana's told me about Kryptonians, and I admit, that your physical powers and your technology are remarkable," Hippolyte admitted. "But believe me, it's nothing compared to the abilities of the Gods – but there she is." She referred to Diana, who was approaching them.

"High, Kara, nice to meet you. You've still a problem with those *cuffs*?" Diana had arrived, greeted her and continued, "Yes, mother, that's Kara, better known as Supergirl, a fellow fighter for justice."

"So you indeed know each other," Hippolyte stated please. Then she asked her daughter: "Did you know, that Kara's wearing the '*Bracelets of Aphrodite*'?"

"No," Diana replied, "I even didn't know, those still exist, although I found it remarkable, that Kara was not able to free herself from those. Her strength is extra-ordinary, you must know."

"Well," Kara said, "since your people have no means to free me, from those, Diana, I would appreciate, if you could accompany me back to Gotham City."

"You know, why I don't want to set my foot into this inhospitable town again," Diana rejected her suggestion at once.

"Because, the people there wanted to bring you to trial?" Kara guessed.

"Because of that and the way they

treated us, after all we did for them."

"Diana, there is a reason, why I'm wearing those," Kara said, "someone – and I don't mean the police – wanted us out of the way for some big coup. This is going to happen soon, because our sentence wouldn't have been anything other than one of acquittal. It would be better, if we had someone with your powers on our side, who's not hampered like me."

"The people of Gotham don't deserve my help," Diana was very firm about this.

"Diana, you don't know the people of Gotham at all. They are by no means better or worse than humans anywhere else. We fell victim to a scheme invented by some criminal mastermind, not by the people of Gotham," Kara tried to argue.

"You still like the people of Gotham 'though they did this to you?" Diana asked, referring to Kara's *chained* hands.

"Hell, Diana, it were not the people of Gotham, who did this to me," she exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, your royal highness," she added when she saw how the Amazons around reacted to her curse. "Not even the police lieutenant, who put them on me knew what he had done."

"What you say, sounds reasonable, Kara," Diana admitted after thinking about it. "Maybe I should accompany you for a few days. After all I can't leave you helpless like this," she said mockingly, "of course, if you don't object, mother?"

"Permission granted," Hippolyte replied with a warm smile. So the two super-heroines headed back to Gotham.

Chapter 4

Investigations

Time flows slower on Paradise Island, which is physically part of another universe with slightly different laws of nature. So Kara's short visit there gave Barbara three days for investigations on her own. The first question was, how Kara's special *handcuffs* had found their way into the evidence vault. Presumably this had happened not long ago and on purpose.

The receptionist was able to tell her, that they had been confiscated two weeks ago in minor case of theft, which was quickly solved and led to a fine for the thief, an otherwise spotless saleswoman, named Sally Krane, working for an adult shop. While everything else – nothing remarkable among it – was claimed by the owner of this shop, those *bracelets* were not claimed and put in the excess storage.

It was not difficult to find out, that Sally Krane, who was fired afterwards, had worked for just two days in this shop, had never existed as a real person and, that the adult shop sold nothing looking even remotely similar to those *bracelets*.

The public relations officer got a tip, leading to the requirement for these *cuffs* for Kara's public arrest from a raven haired female police Sergeant of reportedly pretty appearance, who could not be found by description and presumably was not a member of the Gotham force at all.

In addition Barbara found, that the director of the prison the two super-heroines were brought to, had collected some gambling debts, which mysteriously dissolved themselves before their intake.

The matron, who had processed them turned out to be his wife, and after some pressure from Barbara's colleagues he admitted to have received the collar for Supergirl and the precise prescriptions, how to treat Diana from a mysterious blond woman, who claimed to work for his credit granter. After Barbara had elucidated these connections, the corrupted director and his wife were fired.

To Barbara all these findings pointed straight to one name – Catwoman, the only woman criminal in town capable of

developing such a plot. As Batgirl Barbara knew for sure, that Selina Kyle, a smart and good-looking business woman, currently working for Markham Inc. was the notorious Catwoman, but Gotham's police and therefore Sargent Barbara Gordon officially did not know that – there was some evidence, but no proof.

Nevertheless in this case it deemed her to be of importance to get her hands on Catwoman. Kidnapping Selina as Batgirl was not recommended. It was neither legal nor – without reinforcement e.g. by Kara – a very promising option, because the Cat had shown more than once, that she was a respectable combatant, and waiting until there was an opportunity to catch the Cat in action was out of question – the Cat had never been caught redhanded. For some reasons she did not want Batman to be involved, too.

So Barbara decided to play a trump, she had kept in store for quite some time – a hair doubtlessly, acquired from the feline villain in a former, still unresolved case of theft. If it could be proved, that this particular hair belonged to the business woman Selina Kyle, working for Markham Inc., the D.A. would file a warrant and if Catwoman was not aware of this in time, they would have her.

A hair of Miss Kyle for the purpose of comparison could easily be obtained by Barbara on a 'private' visit in her office as a member of the regular cleaning crew. Her method of choice to acquire the desired evidence was not in full agreement with police regulations, and this earned

her a serious advice by her father, but it was also not strictly illegal and therefore qualified the subject to be used in court.

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The next morning the aforementioned Selina Kyle was on alert. At least a dozen police officers were on the 127th floor of Gotham's Empire Tower, the highest building in Gotham city, the top of which was leased by Markham Inc.

More than a year ago she had been hired as a secretary to Emmett Finch, the right hand of James Markham himself, and she had done a good job so far.

Long well-formed, muscular legs, shoulder-long, full brown hair, a winning smile and big and bright brown eyes had done as much for winning this position as a first rated degree from Havard, which was still on top of America's most prestigious universities in economics.

As always, when she entered her office she was dressed adequately, a high necked white blouse, black shirt just covering her knees, black nylon stockings and moderately high heels accented her splendid figure today without showing too much.

To get to the point she was an eye catcher. But her male as well as her female colleagues had learned very fast, that the sportive beauty with the warm smile was much more than Emmett Finch's anteroom pet, although none of them would have believed, that she was the legendary woman in the catsuit.

A hard worker, tough in discussion, sharp minded and gifted with the ability

to pinpoint the week spot in someones argument, she had soon earned a certain reputation and manoeuvred herself in the position to climb up the career ladder.

All this was on stake now. They were definitely after her. What mistake could she have made? There was no trace from the notorious Catwoman to the spotless business woman. To flee or to face what was about to come was the question.

Unfortunately the first alternative was not an option anymore – they were everywhere. That saved her from making a decision. She took a seat behind her desk, formed a rhombus with her fingers and awaited the inevitable. Finally lieutenant Derringer and Sargent Barbara Gordon entered the anteroom of Mr. Finch office.

“Miss Selina Kyle?” The big man in the uniform of a lieutenant addressed her.

“That’s me. Good morning, Madam,” she nodded to Barbara, before she directed her eyes back to lieutenant Derringer. “Sir – what can I do for you? Mr. Finch is...,” she pretend, that she assumed, that this was a visit to her boss.

“This is Sargent Gordon, I am lieutenant Derringer, Gotham Police,” a deep male voice used to command cut her words off. “Miss Kyle, we’re not here to visit Mr. Finch. We came to see you.”

“ME? – I don’t know, what you expect. But I’m Mr. Finch’s receptionist. I don’t see, how I might be of any help to you.”

“We are not seeking for help, Miss Kyle,” the lieutenant made clear. “I’m sorry, but we’ve a warrant for your arrest.”

“WHAT?” The big brown eyes grew

even wider. She played the innocent victim very well. “This must be a mistake. I got a speeding ticket three month ago, but that was paid immediately.”

“This is not about speeding, Miss Kyle,” Derringer explained. “You are under suspicion to be involved into six cases of capital theft over the last three years.”

“That’s impossible. You have the wrong person,” she objected convincingly. But the lieutenant began to recite the obligatory Miranda-statement. Then he cued Barbara: “Do your duty Sargent.”

She approached Selina and produced a pair of *binged* high-security *handcuffs*. They had safety locks with unique keys, that blocked the double locks. These were the best *restraints* the department had in store, but Barbara doubted, that those were sufficient to hold the Cat.

“*Handcuffs?* For me? Come on lieutenant. What can a small woman like me do against a couple of big guys,” Selina tried to make it sound mockingly.

“It’s a service regulation, Miss Kyle,” lieutenant Derringer explained seriously. “Nothing personal. Political correctness requires, that we treat all our prisoners equally. Maybe you’ve heard about it.”

“You guys are kinky, right? Okay I will participate in the show,” she raised herself and extended her wrists, hands tilted outwards. “Put those *bracelets* on me, I’m not going to offer any resistance.”

“I am sorry, Miss Kyle, in your case those go on to the back,” Barbara intervened, “would you please turn around.”

“As you wish, this way then.” Selina

complied, turned in a fluent move on her heels and presented her hands, wrists together. Barbara fitted her with the special *handcuffs* scheduled for this purpose. She clicked them down two notches tighter than necessary and engaged the double locks secured by a tiny security key.

Although she had chosen the most secure *cuffs* in use by the Gotham police, she was well aware, that those were not of the same quality as her own *bat-cuffs*, which the Cat had defeated more than once.

But security locks required sophisticated picks and, since they had caught her off guard and she had applied them with the key holes facing upwards, there was some hope, that those *cuffs* could provide a challenge even for the Cat. She fetched a pair of short *chain leg-irons* too, but to her chagrin her superior stopped her.

“We won’t make a show of it, Sargent. Miss Kyle is secured according to the regulations, that’s enough. Could you please place a jacket over her shoulders. Not everyone has to see, that she’s *handcuffed*.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Selina said quickly with a winning smile, “that’s very kind.”

“But, Sir,” Barbara objected, “if she’s, who we suspect her to be, and I’m shure about this, she’s VERY dangerous. I strongly recommend *leg-irons* and an additional pair of *handcuffs* for her elbows.”

“We don’t want to exaggerate this, Sargent. Miss Kyle has collaborated exemplary. Put the jacket of her over her shoulders, and then let’s go.” He made it sound definitely, and he was in charge.

“Thank you, Sir. I promise, I won’t

cause you any trouble,” Selina said quickly. Reluctantly Barbara had to set aside her own concept of proper *restraint*.

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The Cat was given into the custody of two badged officers, and the warrant for searching her office was executed – without success. No further evidence was found. However when they drove back, they heart over police radio, that Selina Kyle had escaped on her transport from Empire Tower to the police headquarter.

Both accompanying officers had been knocked out so quickly, that they were not even able to tell who had done this. Her *handcuffs* were found opened, but undamaged in the back of the police cruiser.

Unfortunately shortly after this there was an “accident” in the laboratory where the genetic comparison had been performed, which did not cause much damage, but burned the just single hair, they could connect to Catwoman, and all the records about it. Barbara fumed: The Cat was well-known to be good in her profession, but here Selina had delivered a true masterpiece in finding out where the evidence against her came from and how to eliminate it in no time. To her chagrin her next move was of similar quality.

Barbara’s mood was not raised, when she heard, that Miss Kyle had entered the D.A.’s office two hours later, accompanied by one of James Markham’s most expensive lawyers and claimed, that she had been liberated against her will by a

masked woman, who was dressed like the famous Batgirl. She asserted perkily, that she had rejected the caped crusader's offer to free her and that she wanted to deliver herself back into custody voluntarily in order to prove her innocence.

"I submit myself to the justice of the authorities of Gotham City, in faith, that a fair trial will prove my innocence and restore my reputation as a spotless citizen," she stated forthrightly into the accidentally present camera, her big brown eyes looking like personated ingenue, while a man of the badged force cruelly applied a pair of massive *binged handcuffs* to her demonstratively extended, slender wrists.

"Officer, these *bracelets* are really not necessary," she announced nonchalantly, after the camera was shut off. "I'm here voluntarily, so I've hardly any intention to flee," she argued not unreasonably.

"You are waisting your time, lady," the old man said, "I trained Officer Gordon, who arrested you, and, if she think's you are guilty, you are guilty for me too. So would you please turn around, Mam."

"Officer, we both know, that I will leave the court as a free woman. These *bracelets* are just for show." The old man took his time to set the double locks.

"No, Lady, they are required by regulations. Those are for people we think to be dangerous," he said and showed her a pair of short *chain-liked leg-irons*. He knelt in order to apply them to her ankles.

Mockingly she stretched her freshly joined hands as far as the *steel circlets* around her wrists and the *waist chain* al-

lowed and raised her index finger. "I have the impression, that it turns you guys on, to see me helpless in all those *chains*."

"I'm too old for this, gal," the man answered. "and I don't believe your story. You've escaped once, and I don't want, that this happens a second time."

"But it wasn't me, it was Batgirl, who liberated me against my will – ouch, you are ruining my stockings," Selina protested, when he fixed the next *steel circlet* around her slender ankle and pinching her silk stockings within its ratchet.

"Would you keep your legs a little bit more together?" The old man asked instead of an answer. With a sigh she complied and the second *circlet* noisily closed around her other ankle. There was less than a foot of *chain* joining these *anklets*. The Cat raised one leg only slightly accompanied by a jingle, estimated her degree of freedom, made an intentionally clumsy move forward, stumbled and almost fell – and this looked authentically.

Barbara, who had the opportunity or displeasure to watch her great entrance from nearby, had her own opinion about it. This woman, who was able to do things, Barbara had had to learn by hard training, almost effortless, had always managed to bring her to the boiling point. She would have given a lot to put this particular villain into a small lightless cell and throw the keys away. Unfortunately today this was not going to happen.

"Officer, I can't walk in all these *chains*," she complained heartbreakingly.

"No problem, Sargent Miller, will as-

sist you.” Barbara grinned. She got at least a show for her interrogation. Selina was presented in full hardware, *hinged handcuffs*, the high-security model, attached to a *waist-chain*, the locks covered by a *metal box* and *leg-irons* connected by a short *chain*, in summary, everything Gotham’s force had in store for high risk criminals.

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“Miss Kyle, you agreed to this interrogation without legal assistance, because you claim to be innocent,” Barbara announced formally, when Selina was led into her office. “We don’t believe in this. I’ve to inform you, that our conversation will be recorded and that all evidence emerging from it, will be used in court against you. Do you understand this?”

“Yes, this is fine, because I have to make a complaint first. I was not only overloaded with physical *restraints*,” Selina yanked on her *chains*, “although I delivered myself into custody to clarify this misunderstanding. But these were not taken off even, after I was locked into a jail-cell. I protest against this treatment. After all I haven’t killed the president.”

“Miss Kyle, we’ve very good reasons to treat you this way. I can assure you, it’s in agreement with the law,” Barbara rejected the allegation, “please take a seat.”

“Sargent, someone wants to ruin me, but you’ve the wrong woman. I didn’t do something wrong and I don’t deserve all these *chains*. Please take them off, Sargent.” She made a good show, in demon-

strating how helpless she was, in particular to impress the male recording clerk.

Barbara refused again to do that and confronted her with the evidence, they had, knowing that the only substantial proof had been destroyed already. If it required a proof, that it had been the Cat, who did this, her prisoner smiled at her, after she’d put her cards on the table.

“Miss Kyle, you’ve been identified with the criminal publicly known as Catwoman with a probability of more than 99%,” she concluded, “and I am sure you’ll agree with me after all, that this criminal deserves these *chains* you’re wearing, so let’s come to the point.”

“This is completely ridiculous, Sargent, I’ve neither heard about this ‘catwoman’ before nor done anything of these awful things, you accused me of.” Selina continued to play the innocent business woman. “I can only repeat, you’ve the wrong woman. This evidence, you claim to have against me, is wrong and it won’t stand proof on trial.”

“Please spare us the small-talk, Kitty-Cat, I’ve good reasons to assume, that the recent accusations against Wonder Woman and Supergirl originated in a conspiracy and, that it was you, who’s behind this,” Barbara stated. “This was well planned and has had a negative impact on the security of this city already. Therefore I want to know, why you wanted to take these two benefactors of Gotham at least temporarily out of action.”

“As far as I know from the news these ‘two benefactors of Gotham’ are on the

run after they'd been lawfully arrested," Selina retorted. "Why don't you go after them instead of putting an innocent little secretary like me into all these *chains*?" She stressed her point. "But this is presumable beyond YOUR capabilities."

"You are ANYTHING ELSE than an innocent little secretary, Kitty-Cat, and you can complain about your 'jewelry' as long as you want, I won't remove it. Get used to it," Barbara replied. "We both know it was you, who organized every minor detail in the two superheroine's arrest personally and the only thing I want to know from you now is, why you did it."

"Isn't it inappropriate for a police Sargent, to call these fugitives 'benefactors' and 'heroines'?" Selina played her chosen rôle convincingly. "Obviously no one here cares about the fact, that two potentially very dangerous fugitives with superpowers are running free in Gotham."

"A special task force takes care of this, Kitty-Cat. What I want to know from you is, why you undertook all this effort to create a chart house of ill-founded charges although you know, that those will break down soon," Barbara inquired.

"As a common citizen I thought, that it's up to a judge to decide, if charges are pressed correctly or not, but the Gotham police force..." This woman was nuisance, in Barbara's opinion she had always been.

"Here's another plain question, Kitty-Cat," Barbara interrupted her. "When Supergirl was arrested, you provided even the *handcuffs* for this show event. Actually the latter, which are are presumably de-

stroyed by Supergirl by now, turned out to be an invaluable relict, which was lost long ago," Barbara explained. "Tell me at least, from whom you obtained this."

"Since we are talking about *handcuffs*," Selina replied, "I want those off, now. Either you take yours of me now or I won't tell you anything." The cat had changed tactics, but not told her anything yet.

"That's the wrong order, Kitty-Cat," Barbara clarified, who was in charge. "First you'll give me some information e.g. about those *cuffs*, you provided for Supergirl, and then, I may consider to take yours off for the rest of this interrogation. Up to now you've delivered nothing."

"Why are you so interested in those *handcuffs*? Could it be, that even the omnipotent super-criminal, was not able to get them off?" Selina smiled. For the first time the Cat had slightly lifted her mask.

"As I told you, we assume, that they've been destroyed by Supergirl, who couldn't know, that they are an invaluable historical artifact. I just want to know how, they came into your possession."

"Look Sargent, I don't know anything about it, except what was in the news. I think this conversation is useless." This was it. Selina would not tell her anything. "I'm very sure, that you've nothing to hold me here for more than a day and I can't tell you things, I don't know about."

Catwoman had refused to give any answers. Barbara wished, she would have access to a medieval torture chamber, but since she had no substantial evidence, there was no legal way to get something

out of the Cat, who knew this, too.

“Okay, Miss Kyle, raise yourself,” Barbara said, “you’re wasting my time. Since you don’t want to cooperate, you can play for the next few hours with your ‘charm bracelets,’” Barbara said and wanted to direct her out of the interrogation room.

“How’s Supergirl doing, with HER ‘charm bracelets’, Bat?” Selina whispered in passing, so that only she could hear it.

“Your little plan failed, Kitty-Cat. She’s ripped them off. They were not strong enough to hold a REAL super-heroine,” Barbara whispered back. “But she’ll not be amused, if she gets to know, who’s the one, who put them on her. I don’t want to be in your shoes right now. Kryptonians are VERY resentful.” Selina’s cool expression faded a little bit, and that was at least a little reward for Barbara.

After just two hours, she had to spend in her small jail cell, Selina was driven to court, still in *handcuffs* and *leg-irons*, but in a police cruiser, not in the regular prison transport, which spared her the cameras.

As usual the judge ordered her *restraints* to be removed in court room and, since she had no criminal record and had proved her intention to cooperate with the authorities by her voluntarily return, he saw no reason to keep her in custody. The bail was ridiculously low, so that she could pay it from her own money immediately and leave court as a free woman.

Barbara’s mood, which had not hit rock bottom yet, was “improved” even further, when the D.A.’s office told her, that without the hair, which had been de-

stroyed, the evidence against Miss Kyle was not sufficient to win the case and that the D.A. had decided to drop all charges. Instead he had suggested a formal inquiry about Batgirl’s possible entanglement.

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With respect to another line of investigations Barbara was more successful. According to her research, the gambling debts accumulated by the former prison director over several years had been accumulated almost without exception in illegal betting offices run by the Penguin, who was known to have a certain affinity to Catwoman, and, it had definitely been him, who had cleared off all debts.

To Barbara this meant, it had been him, who had also hired the Cat, who was known to be independent, to take care about Supergirl and Wonder Woman. But what was he up to? As far as she knew, there had been no conspiracy against Batman or herself, although Batman had battled the Penguin more often than anyone else. Why were Batman and herself not regarded a threat to the planned operation, why only Kara and Diana?

Gotham’s underworld had suffered heavily recently. Poison Ivy and Amba Kadiri were only the most prominent figures from Gotham’s honorable society, who had been arrested recently, more or less by Batman and Robin. Robin had been badly injured during the dangerous ride. But the gangs of Gotham and those criminals, who were not organized in gangs, like the Cat ought to be on alert.

There were signs of a temporary alliance formed by several villains and super villains and their followers in order to exert revenge on the Dark Knight and the Gotham police department. Gotham's badged and unbadged force was well aware of that. Something was going on in town, but concrete information was rare, and the usual sources were unreliable.

The conclusion, that the recent operation against Diana and Kara mainly conducted by Catwoman according to Barbara's opinion was only part of some bigger operation, was not implausible, and some precautions had been taken.

Batman had reacted to the recent news already and arranged, that the badly injured Robin was transferred to a foreign hospital in an unknown country, where he should be able to recover safely, which was assumed to take several month.

Likewise Barbara's father had finished negotiations to transfer Poison Ivy and Amba Kadiri to a high security prison in Metropolis, which provided better security and even more importantly was presumably outside the "operation area" of most of Gotham's well-known criminals.

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The latter operation had a top level security classification, so that Jim Gordon refused to tell any details, even to his daughter. Security for Poison Ivy and Amba Kadiri was at top level anyway. Both villains were kept under physical *restraint* and in the strictest isolation.

It was debated in the media, if it was legal to treat the two women this way. Every time pictures were shown of Poison Ivy shuffling around in *handcuffs* attached to her waist by a *steel chain* and short *chained leg-irons*, although she was confined in a gas proof tank only connected to the rest of the world by a caisson lock, constructed to confine her.

Even more public attention gained Amba Kadiri, the "Indian snake woman". The latter was kept in special cell-cage, only a few yards in diameter. But she still wore the *bat-cuffs* Batman had used to arrest her. Two pairs of *chain-linked bat-cuffs* secured her arms behind her back, one pair on the wrists and the other directly above her elbows. In addition an oversized pair of *bat-cuffs* secured her ankles, allowing her only tiny steps on bare feet.

This had attracted a lot of public interest, because in contrast two Poison Ivy's trial, which took place in the prison, where her tank was located, hers was held in public and those *restraints* were never removed, which meant, that she appeared on screen with them in place regularly in the morning and evening news.

The judge's ruling, to keep her like this for security reasons, was heavily debated in the public news and human rights activist had filed several request to terminate this inhuman treatment of the small and innocent looking woman.

While Amba Kadiri indeed looked small and innocent, an impression further underlined by her refusal, to wear anything more than a bikini swimsuit and her

habit to walk barefoot, she was almost as dangerous in direct combat as the Cat.

But While Catwoman had never killed someone, except if her own life was in serious danger, to Amba Kadiri the life of other people meant nothing. She was capable of killing a strong man with a single stroke of her develish steel claws, and she had proved this several times.

The latter had been removed, after she was arrested, but it had been her, who had injured Robin severely, before Batman had been able to overpower her.

Nevertheless during her trial for the media it had been an attractive show to capture this beautiful woman, wearing nothing more than the bikini swim suit, shuffling into the court room every morning and shuffling out every evening.

But the Judge was firm: Although her woman lawyer, a high profile defense attorney from Metropolis, hired by dubious figures of the Gotham underground demanded this violently, the Amber Kadiri was never released from her bondage.

Responsible for this decision was a video taken and provided by Batman showing her slicing Robins throat, with blood floating down in streams. The latter had barely survived the attack. But the Judge as well as the jury had seen it and did not feel comfortable about this quick moving killer sitting just a few feet away.

So the dock had been transformed into a man sized cage with an inch thick bars and the defendant had to kneel in this cage – she had insisted to kneel on a mattress – with her *shackles* in place.

As a rule during the trial the following routine had been established: Two muscle packed police officers trained in martial arts took the Indian Snake woman out of her cell-cage and marched her to an armored transporter, inside which her *shackles* were secured via padlocks.

At least four officers accompanied the transport, which was itself escorted by four police police cruisers while other officers guarded the route. When they arrived at the shielded entrance of the court house. Amba Kadiri was taken out of the van and had to shuffle to her cage. Her *shackles* were fixed to the bars via padlocks, then the cage was closed.

Only when this had been affirmed, the judge, the jury, lawyers and accredited reporters were allowed to enter the court room. Amba Kadiri endured all this stoically without showing any reaction or saying a word. She did not answer questions or show any reaction. She rested inside her cage like a meditating Buddha.

But, when Batman took the stand, – he was allowed to protect his identity by wearing his famous outfit – the blandly snake woman showed a hefty reaction. She reared up in her *shackles*, pure hate in her eyes and said in clear English, but with an inhumanly low voice. “Scarecrow, you are dead. I’ll rip you into pieces.”

These were the only words spoken by Amba Kadiri during her trial. Batman’s mouth smiled mockingly, but his eyes did not smile, when he replied in an equally low voice, “I’ll be to your disposal, if you can afford the time – anywhere, anytime.”

She had been sentenced to twenty years, while Poison Ivy got forty. Her trial did not catch so much attention because it was held within the facility, where she was imprisoned, without public covering.



Barbara's father was not happy about Amba Kadiri's public trial either, but the mayor had insisted on it. He once remarked to his daughter, that half of the force had been out of action for almost three weeks just to secure a trial, which could have been finished within two days.

Although Barbara could not rule out, that Gotham's underworld was aiming at something else with the recent actions, she was convinced, that it was concerned with the arrest and conviction of those two of its most prominent members.

What had caught her attention in particular was a flight list for proposed night starts from Gotham Airport, discovered in the office of one of the Penguins book-makers. This copy of a secret internal document was most likely acquired by bribing or blackmailing some official.

Since Gotham like other boom-towns had grown over the years, the outskirts had reached the airport and the people living there by now fought a long-lasting legal war against night flights. While courts had denied a strict prohibition of night flight, they had ordered to reduce them to a minimum, and it required a properly founded request, filed at least two weeks in advance to get a plane off the ground between 11 PM and 6 AM.

On this list was a start requested by Gotham Police with her father – Gotham police commissioner James Gordon himself – as the primary contact person. It was suspicious, that her father was mentioned at all – normally he would have delegated it to some subordinate – and of course, that he had not told her about it.

Actually for Barbara it had been much easier to obtain this information, the Penguin presumably also had obtained by now, before – she knew her fathers passwords, and he did not know about this.

The Gotham police department planned to transfer the two super villains by airplane to Metropolis in three days. This close and dagger operation was naturally classified as top secret. But obviously the details had been leaked already.

Barbara found the facts, gathered up to now, interesting enough to inform Batman. Bruce Wayne listened to her arguments and replied. "I agree, the Penguin and his companions are up to something around this flight. Assuming they don't want to sabotage the plane or shoot it down, they have to strike either at Gotham or at Metropolis airport."

"But this makes no sense," Barbara objected, "my father and his colleague in Metropolis have entered into an agreement with the US-Army to guard both airports, and, as adventurous the Penguin and his henchmen might be, combating the Army is beyond their capabilities."

"Well I think, we can be sure, that this won't be a direct attack. But we have to guard the takeoff and landing anyway. I

will be in Metropolis around this time for business negotiations, if you could watch the takeoff, it will be fine. What worries me most, requires a different approach.”

“What do you mean?” Barbara asked.

“I suspect, that they’ll have someone on the plane,” the Dark Knight explained his thoughts. “and presumably your father will not allow you or me to be on this plane, too, in order to counter this.”

“Hell, no. He doesn’t even know, that I know about this flight. He thinks, that only a few men, he selected personally, know about the details of this operation.”

“Would it help to tell him, that the Penguin knows?” Batman asked frankly.

“Not really,” Barbara replied. “I think, it’s already too late, to cancel the thing.”

“Then we have to rely either on Kara or Diana, better on both” Batman drew the logical conclusion. “They can fly.”

“Kara’s to Paradise Island to seek for help,” Barbara delivered the bad news, “and I don’t know, if she will support us.”

“Is she still upset, because she was arrested?” Batman asked the obvious.

“No, she’s *handcuffed*,” Barbara replied with a grin, which was not visible for him.

“WHAT? She’s Supergirl, nothing made by humans can hold her.” His voice revealed to her that this was one of the rare occasions, on which she had managed to take Bruce Wayne by surprise.

“But ‘her’ *handcuffs* are not human-made. They have probably been manufactured by an ancient Greek God named Hephaestus, and even Kara can’t take them off. That’s why she’s on Paradise Is-

land right now. She hopes that the Amazons might be able to free her from ‘her’ *bracelets*.” Upon his insistence, she told Batman the rest of the story, the whole story, except for the not unimportant fact, that the Cat was involved, too. The Dark Knight rarely interrupted her.

“I agree with your conclusions,” the Dark Knight finally said. “The ‘honorable’ society plans to free Poisson Ivy and the steel clawed Indian snake. Since we both cannot get onto this plane, the most important question is: Do you think, we can count on Kara or Diana in time?”

“I know neither, when Kara will be back, nor, if the Amazon’s have been able to help her, nor, if she will have convinced Diana to accompany her. I guess, Diana is still upset because of her recent arrest.”

“And Kara may not be willing to do something, if she’s still *handcuffed*,” Batman mused. “it’s still strange to imagine, that Kara’s *handcuffed*. But anyway, I will talk to Superman, if he can help us, just in case the two won’t be available. I’ll fly to Metropolis tomorrow. The plane with the two villains takes off in three days. You should guard Gotham’s airport, while I’ll have a look at the one of Metropolis at this time and the rest is up to our Kryptonian and Amazonian friends. Give me a call, if you hear something new in particular, if and when Kara will be available. I don’t know if Clark can afford the time to support us. We’ll hear from each other.”

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Chapter 5

An accidental Acquisition

Later, much later, after they had become more than friends, the former Selina Kyle AKA Catwoman told Bruce Wayne AKA Batman, how she had come into possession of “Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*”.

Selina did not have the opportunity to know her mother very well. The latter had been a rape victim and more or less the result of this crime had been her. When she was a little child, she had hated her mother, because she had rejected her and given her in care of an orphanage.

But when Selina grew older, she understood, that her mother did not really hate her child, but her biological father for, what he had done to her. Therefore she began to look after her mother with the limit means available a teenager. When she finally found her, she was already very ill, poisoned by the waste, a heinous Rupert Morgan had knowingly had build some his tenements upon.

Many of his tenants just became sick, but her mother, whose health was not the best at this time, committed suicide,

when she learned that she had no chance to recover. Although their acquaintance had been only short, they understood each other, and Selina had begun to build up a positive relationship to her mother. She paid and still cares for her grave.

When she found out, what had really happened, she took part in a class action lawsuit against Morgan, which was dismissed, wrongfully dismissed. Therefore she decided to let Morgan pay for it, if not for her mother, who was dead already, then for the others, he had harmed, too.

This happened, long before she eventually became Catwoman. So she still had to learn much about tricking people. But Selina was clever and good-looking. Changing her hair-color from brown to black, adding eyeglasses with window glass, a blouse, which emphasized her feminine attributes accordingly without revealing too much, a skirt ending above her knees and a pair of high heels, accentuating her well formed legs, transformed her into every straight man’s dream.

Utilizing her no less respectable computer skills – another useful knowledge from her university education – she managed to appear as Angelina Meyers, a society journalist, on the invitation list of one of Morgan’s famous private parties.

These parties were not private at all. More or less everyone, who belonged to Gotham’s high society or could make some creditable believe, he belonged to these circles, was invited. Some journalists, who could be trusted to report only what these people expected to read about themselves, were also well received.

It did not require the mental abilities of a genius to draw the conclusion, that the guest list was long enough, that neither Mr. Morgan himself nor one of his subservients could know everyone, who attended the party, or at least could connect a name to every partygoer’s face.

Incidentally a newspaper of Gotham’s omnipresent rainbow press employed a society reporter name Angelina Meyers, who superficially looked like Selina in her new attire, but was occupied differently at the time. To obtain a corresponding press ID and a faked driving license was only a minor problem for someone, who could match Selina’s computer-skills.

This way she had managed to appear on the party, held in Morgan’s mansion, which was big enough to host a folk festival. The unknown beauty naturally caught the eye of Mr. Morgan, who had a certain reputation as a lady-killer. Widespread Rumors said, that more than one of Gotham’s local starlets had ac-

quired a certain wealth after an affair with Rupert Morgan, who could afford this.

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Occasionally Selina introduced herself respectively her fake identity to Mr. Morgan, spreading subtle hints, how impressed she was by Morgan’s wealth and power, pretending to be an easy target of his male craving for reputation.

Up to then she had not decided how to proceed. Selina was already a master-grade lock-picker, a former hobby, which should become a valuable skill later, but by no means an expert in cracking safes or security systems and she had not managed to obtain more than a building plan of Morgan’s mansion, which did not show the details and security installations.

Her original plan had been to gather here and now the information she considered indispensable to break into Morgan’s mansion and more important to leave it unrecognized and unharmed. But Morgan’s interest in her or rather her body provided a much simpler opportunity to obtain, what according to her judgment he owed his former tenants.

“I’m not a material girl,” she remarked in passing after the small talk, “but there’s one thing I envied your wife. She wore a marvelous necklace, when she accompanied you to the president’s dinner.”

“You mean the ‘Stars of Gotham’,” Morgan replied with a knowing predator smile, “yeah, that’s a fine peace of jewelry, costed me quite a few bucks. You have an exquisite and expensive taste, girl.”

“Fine is an understatement, Mr. Morgan,” Selina replied, “it’s simply gorgeous. It looked exactly like the jewelry, I pretended to wear, when I played a princess in my childhood dreams. The thought to touch something so marvelous still excites me, but in my profession the salary of a lifetime is not sufficient for making a deposit on buying something like this.”

“Would you like to wear them, for a few minutes, at least?” Morgan swallowed the lure and gloated over the imagination, that it was him, who was about to catch a fish. “They are here in this house.” Selina did nothing to correct his thoughts.

“Wow,” she canted surprise, “I thought something so valuable would be kept in bank safes all the time and taken out only for VERY SPECIAL opportunities.”

“You are right, but there are some things my wife and I don’t want to separate from. So we installed a burgle-proof safe with all safety-precautions requested by the insurance,” Morgan told her totally unaware of his guest’s true intentions.

“And if you would fetch this gems for me, you would have to shoot me in order to protect these secrets,” Selina replied. “No, Mr. Morgan, wearing this necklace might have been a dream of mine even before I knew, that they really existed, but I know, where I belong in this life.”

“I have a weakness for beautiful woman, Angelina,” Rupert Morgan threw his net. “I may call you Angelina?”

“Of course, Sir.” She treated him with the level of deference a man in his position expected, but not a stitch more.

“Well Angelina, if we take some precautions, I think we can make an exception,” he tried to lure her. “I might let you wear these gems for a few minutes, provided you won’t tell my wife about it – Lucinda can be very jealous, you know.”

“What do I have to do for it?” She asked directly aware of his intentions.

“The sight of a beautiful young girl like you wearing them will be enough reward for my old eyes.” Selina looked into his lustful eyes and did not believe a single word, but the opportunity foreshadowed by these words was too tempting.

“I know, that I shouldn’t do this,” she said carefully, “but I would regret it for the rest of my life. Mr. Morgan, you know how to twist a girl around your finger.”

“I await you at the door, in the saloon in half an hour,” he replied conspiratorially. “It leads to our private quarters.”

“I will be there, Mr. Morgan,” she replied, and she was there, but not as the easy prey, he expected. Morgan let the beautiful self-proclaimed avenger to a private elevator. It took them up together to a floor where his office was located.

Behind the door was an antechamber, where occasionally his private secretary might be situated, if Morgen choose to work here, and the office itself. He went directly to a small safe and opened it. It had a simple combination lock. She could not see the numbers, but it opened up.

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But instead of the “Stars of Gotham” he produced, what looked like a pair of

black *iron manacles* linked by a short *chain* and a tiny key. Selina was really baffled.

“Believe it or not, but THIS is my most valuable possession, Angelina,” Rupert Morgan stated, ignoring her wide open eyes, that expressed disbelief. “They are more valuable than all this jewelry stored in the safe over there,” he said pointing to a back door leading to another room behind his huge personal writing table. There was an almost imperceptible hint, that he wanted her to wear them.

“WHAT? That’s a pair of *handcuffs*,” She had expected anything but this. Was this a joke or did he really believe, she would be so stupid to let him put those on her?

“No, Angelina, those are the ‘*Bracelets of Aphrodite*’”, Morgan stated seriously, “two out of three of them. My father got them from Garry Marsdon, a highly recognized British archaeologist and specialist for the ancient Greek culture. He believed, that the Greek Gods were a race of extraterrestrials with technical capabilities far ahead of our own, even now.”

He made this sound very important. However, at this time Selina was utterly convinced, that these were just a kind of cheap sex toy and that the dirty old man wanted to trick her into putting them on in order to deal with her, as he pleased.

“Nevertheless, this is plainly a pair of *handcuffs*, small *handcuffs* made for women. You don’t think about putting *handcuffs* on me. Do you?” She formulated it carefully. She had read his face and knew, that this was a condition sine qua non. But she did not want to make it too easy for him.

“No of course not. But these are everything else than a pair of common *handcuffs*. My father hired a specialist to investigate them. They are far stronger than any material known to science today. Even Superman couldn’t break them,” he advertised, what Selina considered a cloddish trap for young, innocent girls.

“This sounds very interesting, Mr. Morgan, however didn’t you want to show me the family jewels or should I say crown jewels? Their fame is legendary comparable only to those of the British Royal family,” she tried to distract him.

“Well there are two or three other collections, which might compare well to those,” he conceded flattered and cajoled.

“But not in Gotham,” Selina replied. “Please, Mr. Morgan, you promised to show me the marvelous necklace your wife wore on the presidents dinner.”

“Right, I promised, Angel,” Morgan said hesitatingly. “But my insurance agent will kill me, if I open the safe in the presence of a foreign person. You *must* not see the combinations and precautions.”

“Put a blindfold on me then, this scarf over there will do,” she suggested pointing at the garment over a chair, which had been discarded obviously by its owner.

“You won’t pull it off?” He sounded dubious, but Selina was not easy to fool.

“Woman scout’s word of honor, Mr. Morgan, pleeeaaase!” She tried to look like a college coed, who was eager to see those jewels, and was quite good in it.

“Okay, let’s make a compromise. You’ll sit down on this chair, and I’ll put

this blindfold AND ‘Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*’ on you, then I’ll fetch the necklace, you’re so fond of, and you may wear them for five minutes without blindfold. After that they go back in the safe, I’ll take the *bracelets* off, and we will join the party again. I might already be missed, you know.” He was trying to push her.

“I don’t know, Sir,” Selina replied, “wearing a blindfold is okay, but those *handcuffs* scare me. I’ve never worn *handcuffs*.” Back then it was the plain truth.

“Oh, it will be an interesting experience, believe me. Besides these are no *handcuffs*. The Greek Goddess Aphrodite shall have worn them for several years. That’s of course only an unconfirmed rumor. But I can assure you they are very comfortable to wear – you’re by no means the first to do so. Give them a try.”

“If you say so, but you’ll take them off, right after you closed the safe?” She tried to make these words sound worriedly, but thought, that she had this mean crook right, where she had wanted him to be.

“Boy scouts word of honor, Angelina,” Morgan could hardly conceal his triumph. “Come, give me your hands.” She smiled and extended her wrists seductively towards him hands tilted outwards.

“Then do your duty, officer.” Her eyes smiled, when she presented him her hands, the wrist close together ready for *cuffing*. It was a perfect gesture of submission, but the woman, who should become the Cat was anything but submissive.

“No not this way,” Morgan objected. “Behind your back of course.” She turned

on her heels and bowed forward, her wrist stuck out in parallel behind her back – a fluent move only the Cat was capable to perform in perfect limberness like this.

“Better, Officer?” She whispered mockingly. Her voice was dulcet. He almost drolled when he closed the *bracelets* with distinct clicks around her wrists, locked them and finally removed the key.

“Now you are wearing, ‘Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*’, Angelina. Not many woman hve had the opportunity to wear them. How does it feel?” She took a look at them, stretching the connecting *chain* to its limit. The *bands* were very smooth and surprisingly heavy, a tight fit, not uncomfortable if there would not not have been the short *chain* linking them together.

“Like a pair of *handcuffs*, Mr. Morgan,” she said tilting her captive wrists, “sorry, but that’s what they look like to me.”

“Well Hephaistus is said to have made them in order to enforce the faithfulness of his wife,” Morgan replied almost casually, trying to hide his triumph. “You know who Hephaistus was?” He asked.

“An ancient Greek God – the guy who *chained* Prometheus to a mountain,” she revealed some unexpected knowledge about the ancient world. “A mythological figure, who’s never existed after all.”

“You are well educated, Angelina. But in the latter point you are wrong,” Morgan explained seriously. “Hephaistus has existed, and those *bracelets*, you are wearing, are the proof for this. They’ve been forged by him, long before humans were able to forge something as simple as *steel*.”

“They look like cheap *manacles* of the kind some men or women buy for too much money in adult shops to play kinky games with each other.” Selina did not want this dirty old man to think, she had actually bought this far-fetched story.

“Oh, no, Angelina, those *bracelets* you are wearing would easily hold the strongest man, even Superman, if they would fit to a male wrist,” Morgan claimed seriously. “But they’ve been made for the most beautiful woman, who ever existed. At least that’s, what the ancient Greeks believed. Even today nobody is able to produce something even similar to this craftsmanship and quality.”

“When you say so.” Selina still thought, that Morgan had made up the whole story in order to impress her.

She felt, that he was about to object and dwell on this matter, but then he simply said, “as far as I know you are not married?” Now it began to get interesting.

“No, Mr. Morgan.” She said with a mocking undertone. “I’m not married.”

“Someone who counts on your faithfulness?” He undertook the next step.

“No one, who knows that he could, if he wanted,” she pretended an unexpected amount of equanimity. For him this looked like, either she did not bother about being *handcuffed* by a stranger, or she did not believe to be in danger, because she thought, he was too old.

“What about the necklace?” She asked before he was able to finish his reflection about her cool understatement.

“Of course, maybe we can have some

fun together afterwards?” She should not be able to misinterpret his intentions.

“You do not think about keeping me in these *handcuffs*?” She asked, raising her joined wrist around her right hip. Again there was this mocking undertone. This woman acted as if she had everything under control even now, and this was definitely a new experience for Morgan.

“Those are *bracelets*, very expensive *bracelets*, as I told you, Angelina – much more worth than the necklace you are so fond of wearing.” Selina recognized, that he had not answered her question. From the fact, that he did not mention the scarf anymore, she concluded, that he did not consider her a threat to his most precious possession, but had made the whole thing up in order to trick her into letting him put these antique *handcuffs* on her wrists.

He eventually went to fetch the object of her desire and, since he took his time to do so, Selina used hers to twist sideways and investigate ‘her’ newly acquired *bracelets*. She was a master lock-picker already, and as such it was an unexpected experience, that she was easily able to locate the key-holes but by no means to open the locks behind them.

“So here are the stars of Gotham. Bend your head a little bit, dear,” he interrupted her and, when she did so, he closed the precious gems around her neck. They were marvelous indeed.

“You may take a look at them,” he announced pointing to a large mirror on the wall. Selina raised herself effortlessly and admired the gems. With her hands fixed

behind her back she was forced to stretch her chess out. She could feel, that Morgan's eyes did not rest on the famous diadem but on her equally impressive female attributes residing directly beyond the famous gems. Almost absently he commented: "They suit you very well, dear."

"When I was a child, I often dreamed to be a princess, and in my dreams I always looked like this. They are really gorgeous," she admitted. She tried to reach for the gems and pretended that the reaching fingers of her right hand were stopped a few inches away from their target by the tight *metal band* on her wrist.

"They'll go back in the safe soon," he reminded her ignoring her pleading look.

"May I touch them, Sir? PLEASE!" She begged and twisted her joined wrists around her hips, pretending to be helpless. "This *chain* is simply too short."

"No dear, our deal was you wanted to know how they look on you," Morgan rejected her desire. "Touching them with your hands was not part of the deal."

"But, Mr. Morgan, how can you be so cruel, keeping me *handcuffed*?" She tried her small children voice and twisted her *cuffed* wrists, emphasizing her helpless condition. Morgan thought, he finally had her where he had wished her to be.

"Actually *handcuffs* do a lot for every woman's figure, they put your nice breast on display and the stop you from doing something against this," Morgan smirked and pinched her into her left breast.

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"THAT, Mr. Morgan, was a BIG mistake," there was enmity and determination in her voice, he had never expected a woman – any woman – to be capable of. Morgan shuddered for a second.

Selina clenched her fists, but they were useless now. He grinned, when he saw the glimpse of anger in her brown eyes. Without any warning she rammed her knee into his groins, and while he collapsed in pain, she had changed the distance, so that her high heels clad foot, which clashed against his forehead now could develop enough speed to knock out a heavy weight champion. Morgan was just an old man, not particularly well trained. He was instantly unconscious.

Selina quickly lowered her hands behind her back and stepped through the connecting *chain* of 'her' *bracelets*. She was slim and flexible and would have been able to do so with much more restrictive *cuffs* like the ones the police used to apply to their customers. She made another attempt to open them with the multi purpose lock-pick, she used to carry with her, but to her chagrin, again the cursed pick simply did not work as intended.

Angrily she gave the still unconscious victim of her high speed kick a body search and thereby acquired the tiny key, which opened both *bracelets* without difficulties. The useless *manacles* clattered to the ground. Carefully she took the jewels off and stored them in her purse.

She was already about to leave, but then she came back and stuffed the discarded *bracelets*, she still believed to be

a sex-tool of a dirty old man, into her purse, too, together with the matching key, mainly out of curiosity, because she had not been able to pick their locks.

Selina disappeared and was never seen again. Surprisingly Morgan did not press charges against the unknown thief. Instead he pretended, that his visible injuries were due to a home accident.

He ordered a renown jeweler to produce a precise copy of the stolen necklace and hired a couple of hit men to find and kill the unknown thief. The latter were not successful, but the boulevard reporter, whose identity Selina had assumed during her visit, had a deadly accident about a week after this incident.

A view weeks later the gems appeared separately on the black market and in the following Morgan's former victims received a few remarkable donations from several anonymous benefactors, the total amount of which summed up to the black market value of the stolen gems.

That was, how the remarkable young woman, who should become the Cat acquired 'Aphrodite's *Bracelets*'. Selina had kept the latter merely for sentimental reasons. Robbing Morgan in order to compensate his victims had been her first Robin-Hood-action. But the *bracelets* also taught her something about her limits.

Every time she felt too confident about her lock-picking skills, she took the odd looking pair of *cuffs* out of the drawer, in which she used to keep them, and tried to pick those – always without success. Sometimes when she was in the mood she even tried them on her own wrists, but

always with the key within reach. Catwoman trusted nobody to keep her keys.

The discovery, that even a Kryptonian like Supergirl might not be able to defeat those *handcuffs*, as Morgan had claimed, happened more or less accidentally. The curious Cat wanted to know how those locks, she could not defeat, actually worked and why every copy of the original key she had created had failed to do, what the original one did without problems. So she tried to uncover them. First with simple tools but then with more and more sophisticated ones.

However nothing from a diamond saw up to a high energy laser in a secret laboratory could even scratch the material. In contrast to Barbara, Selina had a solid scientific education (and a master degree in mechanical engineering). Therefore she knew, that she had acquired something truly extraordinary, which according to common wisdom should not exist, and that Rupert Morgan's claim, that the black *metal bracelets* ought to be more valuable than the jewels she had acquired, maybe all the jewels she had acquired over the next few years, might be true.

Of course she never had a definitive proof, that Supergirl could not defeat them, but with regard to their unique properties Selina considered this worth a try. The opportunity should come, when the Penguin approached her in order to find a solution for disabling the two superheroines, and she did it more or less the way Barbara had figured out already.

Chapter 6

Superheroines in Action

Kara was sitting in Barbara's living room, her long legs beated over each other. The gorgeous blond Valkyrie wore a tank top, her favorite type of garment over the last days, narrow trousers high shafted boots and to her constant annoyance the inevitable pair of black *handcuffs*. Almost unconsciously she was toying with the short but unbelievably strong *chain*, that still joined her wrist.

"Babs, these damned little 'devils' drive me crazy," she stated angrily referring to 'her' irremovable *bracelets*, "it's not, that there's something I really can't do, but every time, I try do something, they remind me about their presence and show me, that they are stronger than me."

"Like drinking coffee?" Barbara asked quizzically with a Siamese smile.

"Yeah, even like drinking coffee. It's unbelievable. I can still lift an Aircraft carrier, smash Diamonds with my fingers, but I can't drink from a cup of coffee without having to use both hands for it," she took a sip out of her cup, "it's frustrat-

ing." She sat the cup on the table clasped the *bracelet* on her left hand, with her right one and sliding it forth and back.

"See, one inch upwards and one downward, that's it." She demonstrated this fact plastically. "They don't care, what I want to do. They tell me every day, you are our prisoner, Kara Zor-El, and, whatever you do, you do it at our terms."

"Those are just a few pieces of stout metal, Kara," her fellow heroine replied sympathetically, "not your enemies."

"Have you ever been *shackled* like this for more than three days?" Kara asked.

"No," Barbara replied dryly, "but I've been *shackled* much crueller than you're right now. And some of us weak humans have sustained being *shackled* for years."

"But **THIS** is definitely not going to happen to me, Babs," Kara said firmly. "I have to get those off. I don't know how, but I **WILL** get them off very soon!" She tugged again with all might on the connecting *chain* and Barbara shivered with the thought, what actually would hap-

pen, should this remarkable piece of *metal* break right now. But nothing happens.

“Correct me, if you think different, but up to now, there’s not much, we know, that may help in achieving this.”

“Hephaestus forged them millenniums ago to punish Aphrodite for cheating on him,” Kara summarized, what they actually knew. “There’s only one key fitting those, and according to Diana he’s the only one known, who ought to be able to recreate it or open them without it.”

“But he’s in another dimension, even you cannot reach, and, if we can trust Diana’s judgment, if he’s still alive, he’s not very helpful, neither to humans nor to Amazons or Kryptonians,” Barbara argued reasonably, “so I think, we can either focus on obtaining the only key, which hopefully still exists – or hire a couple of master lock pickers, in order to work on them around the clock.”

“As you know, I don’t like the latter idea. Maybe we should try to talk to this Catwoman, whom you suspect to have stolen those *cuffs* from, whoever stole them from the cavern under the temple of Aphrodite, and, that you suspect to have planned the whole set up to get them on me. Maybe we can simply arrest her, if you come up with something, which could stand a trial against her.”

“Well, it’s actually not easy to catch, Kitty-Cat – at least not red-handed, believe me. If she doesn’t want to be seen, she’s quite invisible. I’ve never managed to find even one of her hiding places.”

“But she’s only human,” Kara’s tone

revealed, that the Kryptonian did not consider it a problem to find a human, any human anytime, she wished to do so.

“Nevertheless, she’s a clever bitch and quite stealthy. You’ve to lure her with something, she can’t resist. But you must not think, that it’s easy to foresee, what Kitty-Cat finds irresistible. And even if you know this, she can sense a trap from miles away. Her biggest weakness is her ambition to achieve the impossible.”

“Sounds like an interesting person, but maybe we should pursue the obvious first. Catching Catwoman can wait.”

“What do you mean?” Barbara asked.

“We’ve always assumed, that the mastermind behind this setup had everything under control including the key to ‘your’ *cuffs*, but perhaps he or, if you’re right, she had not. The last time I remember, that this key must have been present, was when the lieutenant, who arrested us, used it to lock those on me at the police headquarters. Foolishly I didn’t care about it, but most likely he simply put it into his pocket, after he put those on my wrists.” She raised her wrists still joined by a *chain* in front of Barbara’s eyes for emphasis.

“You mean, I should try to find and interview him?” Her fellow heroine asked.

“That would be a start. After all you’re a police officer like him. I don’t think, that he’s been involved in this conspiracy, but maybe, he still knows, where this key went to. Perhaps he even kept it as a souvenir, and you simply have to ask him in order to obtain it?” Kara suggested.

“That would be too easy,” Barbara

replied. “But you’re right, I’ll find out, who it was, and ask him. Do you believe, we can find a so tiny piece of metal?”

“No I don’t,” Kara admitted. “But I’m desperate, Babs, and to be honest the prospect to wear these *bracelets* for the rest of my life really terrifies me.”

“I didn’t know the Girl of Steel could be terrified.” Barbara was serious. There was no trace of sarcasm in her voice.

“Then you’ve learned something, Babs. Everyone has something he or she’s afraid of,” Kara replied. Barbara grinned.

“Besides, supposed I should manage to obtain the key against all odds, what will I get?” She asked with a twinkle.

“What do you mean?” Kara looked blank. “You really want money for helping a friend, who’s in the doghouse?”

“You should know me better than this, Kara,” Barbara hurried to make her point. “No, I don’t want money or anything materially valuable, of course. I just want the promise, that you support me in order to make sure, that the career of a certain thief will find its definitive end.”

“You are crazy, Babs.” Kara understood too quickly. She had already figured out, what her fellow heroine was up to.

“Maybe I am a little bit kinky, but not crazy.” Barbara corrected her. Stubbornly she asked: “Seriously, what do you say?”

“All right,” Kara gave in, “if you manage to obtain this key somehow, I’ll support you, if that’s, what you want, and if the proposed measures do not violate the law, provided this key works of course. It’s a small price for my freedom.”

“Fine I’ll try to find out, what I can.”

“Well, I might try to talk to this Catwoman anyway,” Kara remarked. “She’s accidentally not also the thief, whose career you want to put to a premature end?”

“She’s a very special thief,” Barbara replied. “She’s not only a thief, but a also a nuisance. Each time Batman and I...”

“OK, there’s something personal between you and her,” Kara observed. “Anyway, I’ll try to find her, while you’re on duty. It’s a point on our to do list anyway, and unless she’s some up to now unknown superpowers, this shouldn’t pose a problem. Do you coincidentally have something filed about her? – It might help.”

“Incidentally I’ve copies of all official and unofficial files on her. She was never convicted, but suspected to be behind almost every spectacular theft, which has occurred in Gotham over the last two years.” She went to her her home office and came back with a big folder labeled “Catwoman”, which she handed Kara.

“Very impressive,” Kara admitted, after a superficial look at the table of contents, which covered several pages.

“And she seems to be a real beauty, too, even masked like on this police photo,” she remarked. “She must have brought in by Batman or you, because she’s wearing a pair of *bat-cuffs*. But isn’t it custom in Gotham to take these photos so, rhat the face is visible, too?”

“Yeah, that’s not an official police photo. I took it with my cell-phone-cam – unfortunately with her mask in place. It was two years ago and required both of us

to take her in. Unfortunately she escaped five minutes after this photo was taken. However, Batman and I know, who she is – Selina Kyle, a simply little secretary working in the headquarters of Markham Inc. – Here’s an unmasked photo.”

“She still looks like a cute, innocent girl to me,” Kara remarked, “hard to think, that she’s Gotham most wanted – And, yes, she’s definitely a beauty.”

“You wouldn’t be the first, who’s fooled by this cute, innocent look. She’s as tough as the meanest villain in town. I arrested her recently and tried everything to squeeze her out, without success. We had to let her go, once again. The problem is not to find her, but to catch her red-handed.” She sighed. “Sometimes it’s hard to be restricted by the rules, while these criminals can do what they want to do, whenever they want to do it.”

“If we would not stick to the rules, Babs,” Kara replied, “we would hardly be better than the ones we fight. However, you said, she’s managed to escape you and Batman – with *bat-cuffs* on?” Subconsciously she looked at her *cuffed* hands.

“No,” Barbara replied, “she’d managed to pick those before. We found them open on the floor of her improvisational holding cell, but no trace of Kitty-Cat.”

“Batman never mentioned, that a simply human villain ever escaped his *cuffs*. He was always very proud of them.”

“Actually Kitty-Cat motivated him to improve them several times. Quite recently, presumably after another negative experience with this nuisance, he cre-

ated the ‘special’ model ‘C’ of his *bat-cuffs*, where ‘C’ stands for Catwoman. I always carry a pair. Do you want to see it?”

“Why not,” Kara replied. “I never cared much about *cuffs*, likely because I could rip them apart, until I got these.”

“Here, that’s the model ‘C.’” Barbara handed her a pair of heavy, brand-new, black *bat-cuffs* from her utility belt.

“It looks like any other pair of *bat-cuffs* to me. I don’t see, what’s so special about them?” Kara gave them back to Barbara.

“There are no key holes – look here. Once applied only the double locks can be set by pushing these little pins. That’s a standard feature of *handcuffs*, they prevent the ratchets from closing further and hurting the wearer’s wrists. Normally the locks of *handcuffs*, any type of *hand-cuffs*, can be opened by a key, but since the model ‘C’ has no key holes, those here have to be cut off, which in this case requires something like diamond coated saw blades, or they will stay on forever.”

“Isn’t that a little bit over-kill?”

“Oh no,” Barbara confirmed. “Not in the case of Kitty-Cat. She’s escaped from all kinds *bat-cuffs* more than once at record speed, although the locks had been modified in between. There’s simply no other way to confine her reliably.”

“So, maybe she’s the master lock-picker we are looking for?” Kara asked reasonably indicating ‘her’ *bracelets*.

“Maybe, but I doubt it,” Barbara replied. “Those locks are different from anything produced on earth for at least three thousand years. And according to

Dr. Bowman they are a product of a technology, that dwarfs even the one of you Kryptonians. Probably nobody on today's earth really know's, how to pick them."

"Presumably you are right," Kara admitted. "However, if we manage to catch her, before we get this key, if she's that good, it might be worth to give her a try."

"Don't count on it. Catwoman is not very helpful either. If you want to find out, if she can pick those locks, you have to apply them to her own wrists, but this requires to get them off your's first."

"Well, one should not cross bridges, before one come's to them. If we'll have our hands on her, we'll see. If you're right concerning our special friend's plans, I might have to fight them, the way I am. When did Diana want to show up exactly?" Barbara looked at her wristwatch.

"In about five minutes." While she said so, there was a knock on the door and Diana also in unobstrusive street clothes joined them, and the three heroines made last refinements to their plan of action.



"Ready for action, ladies?" Kara, who more or less had taken the lead of their group, finally asked. When her two fellow heroines nodded, she continued declamatorily: "One for all and all for one!"

"You are reading human literature?" Barbara asked with mild astonishment.

"Only the good novels," Karla smiled, "I don't think, that any of Dumas' fictitious heroes ever went to battle like this,"

she said raising her *cuffed* wrists, "but with the three of us standing together like his musketeers, I think, we can handle it."

According to their plan of action Barbara had assumed a position next to Gotham airport. She took her time to clear the terrain. There were neither suspicious moves nor noises. If their opponents had considered to strike here, they must have had something special in mind.

Batman also reported the same from Metropolis airport regarding the presence of known villains. But according to his observation Metropolis police had already sent a larger contingent of the force to terminal three and closed it for public traffic. Barbara knew, that her father would not like this, but he would not like to meet her at the current location, too.

The plane was ready for takeoff. Obviously no other precautions than keeping it in the restricted area were taken. Then the Gotham police force showed up five minutes before schedule. Two armored prisoner escort vehicles were escorted by no less than two dozen cruisers.

A lot of Barbara's colleagues must have learned very late, that their service schedule had been changed or their holidays were called off. Nevertheless the whole operation was well organized. Officers swarmed all over the the place and secured everything in almost no time.

Finally Amba Kadiri was pulled out of the first van. Barbra observed, that she was still barefoot, covered only by a swimsuit, but every *restraint* allowed by regulations had been placed on her.

Instead of *leg-irons* her colleagues had placed an over sized pair of *hinged handcuffs* on her ankles, which did not allow her to walk at all. A *waist-belt* had been tightly buckled around her waist, so that the ring was at the reverse side.

She wore a pair of *hinged handcuffs*, which were threaded through this ring, and Barbara was sure, that those were of the high security type and that the key holes were facing upwards. An additional pair of *chain-linked cuffs* adorned her upper arms right above the elbows. Even if she miraculously should manage to slip off her tight-fitting *hand-* and *ankle cuffs*, she would still be seriously hampered by those, to which she had no access at all.

Barbara reflected, that precisely this ensemble had been her first choice, when they arrested the Cat. This was the way she would have left the Empire Tower, she would have been convicted for theft, and with a little bit luck she would still be in custody. However, this opportunity had been lost. It had not been her fault.

Two strong police officers had taken hold on Amba Kadiri and, although the snake woman had tried to fight, as if she was about to be taken to hell, they had had no difficulty to carry her to the plane. Barbara was sure, that Amba had been buckled tightly into her seat and would enjoy the constant supervision of at least one of her colleagues during the flight.

With Poison Ivy the whole procedure was more difficult. Barbara observed, that something, what looked like an over sized refrigerator, was pulled out of the

second van by means of a fork truck. Obviously she was inside, and Barbara was sure, that she was well restrained either. The whole containment was brought to the plane, which had a cargo bay, in which it was stored. Poison Ivy was supposed to spend the whole flight in the cargo bay.

Apart from this nothing happened. If Gotham's honorable society was going to strike here, the right time for an attack had passed away, once the plane's doors were closed, and this was the case right now. The plane rolled to the runway.

Barbara observed the spectators. Nobody was particularly suspicious. A young woman made a phone call, maybe she was about to brief the Penguin about the time of departure, but that was not illegal. She would inform her fellow heroines, too.

After they received Barbara's call, Diana and Kara took over. Both super heroines accompanied the plane in order to shield it from a suspected attack.

Diana was dressed as usual, but Kara had exchanged her costume for a completely black one. Barbara assumed, that she had chosen this dress in the color of her *cuffs* in order to hide as good as possible, that she was still wearing the latter.

It was a night flight and the weather was bad, too. Nevertheless Kara and Diana did not want to be spotted or detected otherwise from the plane and so followed it in quite a distance. In the darkness they could rely on Kara's heat vision, which could detect the jet's engines from a considerable distance quite well. But the bad weather made it more and

more difficult to keep an eye at it.

Suddenly the plane was gone. It had been tilted downwards and Kara and Diana, who followed it too far behind, had not noticed the move and missed the tilting point. Inside a dense rain cloud it was not easy to determine immediately, what had really happened. Actually, the two superheroines needed almost half an hour to figure out, what had been going on.

As Barbara had already suspected, no villains were on board of the plane except of course for Amba Kadiri and Poison Ivy, who were well secured. Nevertheless the plane had been kidnapped. After an event-less hour the steering suddenly did not react on the pilots command anymore, and the communication was gone.

Later investigation showed, that during the last maintenance parts of the flight electronics had been exchanged by a manipulated service-kit, which allowed the kidnappers to overtake the steering and shut down the communications by wireless signals. This resulted in the plane with two pilots, a dozen police officers and the two villains on board going down, as if the machine were on autopilot.

Luckily the villains had no interest in killing its passengers at least not as long as Amba and Ivy were on board. So someone, who had been a good pilot, before a drug-affair terminated his career, took over and landed the plane on an old air force field, which was not in use anymore.

The penguin had gathered a strong and well armed force of his henchman, and they were well equipped to enter the

plane. Barbara's colleagues who, once the plane was safely on the ground, wanted to defend themselves, had no chance.

When the two superheroines finally reached the scene, half of Jim Gordon's bravely fighting men were already dead or wounded, and the rest was facing unavoidable defeat. Amba Kadiri had been freed from her *restraints*, and Poison Ivy had been taken out of her sealed box. Two of the attackers were working on her *cuffs*.

Kara judged the situation and drew the right conclusion. She wasted no time.

"You take out the snake, I take care for Ivy," she spoke into the microphone. "We'll meet at the old station 10 miles up the rails." She did not wait for reassurance and headed down immediately. The two men, who were busy to free Ivy from her *cuffs* and *irons* were dashed away when Kara darted at Ivy and grepped her at her prison uniform with her joined hands.

In an instant Ivy, who was still *fettered*, was lifted towards the sky away from her would-be-liberators. In the mean time Diana had attempted to undertake the same type of attack on Amba Kadiri.

The Indian snake woman however recognized her approach, and she was fast. Before Diana could take a hold on her intended target, she dashed away to the side and Diana had to take a heavy blow, after she missed her. If Kadiri would have worn her steel claws, Diana might have been seriously wounded.

Diana executed plan B: She took her lasso of truth and swirled it around her head. Even the snake woman was not fast

enough to evade the loop of the magic weapon to close around her middle.

Her liberators however reacted and managed to fire half a dozen shots at Wonder Woman who deflected them with her Femininium bracelets. The problem was not to be exposed to cross-fire. In contrast to Kara the Amazon was not immune to gunfire, but had to rely on her superhuman reactions and the toughness of her Femininium bracelets.

That meant, Diana's abilities to deflect bullets were limited to bullets, she saw. A quick firing machine gun or bullets approaching her from behind posed a serious threat. Once Amba Kadiri middle was enclosed by the lasso of truth, Diana hurried to follow Kara towards the sky with Amba Kadiri in tow. A few shots fired from behind missed their now quick moving and rapidly increasing target.

Following the rails, it was easy to reach the old station, Kara had determined to be their meeting point. Poison Ivy had tried her biological weapons on Kara, but, as the Kryptonian knew from previous experiences with this particular enemy, her extraterrestrial physiology was not receptive to Ivy's poison at all.

Once they were back on the ground, Kara had used her heat vision to weld Ivy's *leg-irons* to her *handcuffs*, combining them to a quite effective *steel* hogtie.

However, neither Diana nor Amba Kadiri would be able stand Ivy's poison. The solution to this problem was provided by an old big water tank, which was rusty from the outside, but leak proof.

Kara simply transferred Ivy into this tank and sealed the cap. It was big enough to provide Ivy with air for at least twenty hours – enough time for a special unit to take her out and return her into custody. She had almost finished this task, when Diana showed up with Amba in tow.

“What shall we do with her?” Diana asked, referring to her bound prisoner.

“Can't you use your lasso on her?” Kara suggested. “It's the safest choice.”

“Yeah, but I don't want to leave it on her,” Diana foreshadowed reluctance.

“Nevertheless, it will do for now,” Kara insisted, “there are still a lot of people we have to take care for very soon.” This was true. So Diana used her lasso of truth to bind the snake woman securely.

Twirling and twisting Amba Kadiri tried everything to avoid being bound, but the combined powers of Diana and Kara, although the latter was *handcuffed*, were much too great to allow her to evade the bonds and her resistance was awarded with a very tight and inescapable hog-tie.

With the two villains secured it was time to head back to the scene of the attack. With their goal out of reach, the penguin's henchmen were just about to leave the scene. However, they could not withstand the combined force of the two superheroines attacking them from the air. Soon they had to surrender unconditionally and lay their weapons down.

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Diana guarded them and the unharmed police officer's cared for their

wounded colleagues, while Kara disabled the device the villains had used to take control over the plane and force it to land.

Once this was achieved, the authorities, which were of course aware, that something was going on, but had no clue, what had happened, could be informed. The plane, which had been damaged in the ground fight would never take off again, but help in form of complete squad of armed helicopters was soon on its way.

Kara tried to stay away from the police officers in order not to show, that she was still *handcuffed*, but that was of no use. Some of them had observed this already.

However it took only five minutes until one of the officers approached Diana, who was guarding the captured villains, and asked her: "Wonder Woman, eh..." he stuttered, "may I dare to ask you a favor?"

"What is it, officer?" Diana replied.

"It does not concern me, it concerns Barry Johnson from the 4th precinct, he has a wife and two daughters...", he began slowly. However, Diana was impatient.

"What is it?" She interrupted him.

"He's lost too much blood," he replied directly, "I'm no doctor, but I think, he'll die, if he doesn't get a blood-transfusion soon. I thought, you or Supergirl..."

"I see," Diana added understanding, "I'll talk to Supergirl, make him ready for transport – he can be transported?"

"Yes, I mean, I think so – there's no doctor here – we would be indebted..."

"Make him ready." Diana sent him away. Then she contacted Kara, who had just talked to Barbara's father and briefed

him, what had happened. He had not mentioned, that the two superheroines were officially regarded as fugitives.

Diana explained the situation to Kara. "One of us has to fly him back to Gotham," she stated, "you or me?"

"Me," Kara said, "when I deliver him, the people in the hospital will look, but nobody will ask questions about those." She raised her *cuffed* hands. "If I stay here, it would be more embarrassing."

"Hey, what about me?" Diana objected mockingly, "I'm a fugitive, too."

"They won't talk about this," Kara replied. "Humans, in particular Americans have a very practical way to ignore facts, if it is advantageous for them."

"And if they do?" Diana asked.

"Then you should do, what we should have done, before we both were arrested – just fly away," Kara replied and added: "I apologize for talking you out of it."

Some officer's watched wide-eyed, when Kara took a hold on the makeshift stretcher, his colleagues had put together for Barry Johnson, who was already unconscious, with her joined hands. Everyone not too far away could see, that she wore *handcuffs*, but nobody said a word.

Kara took off and delivered the patient as fast, as his condition allowed directly to the emergency ambulance of the Gotham General Hospital. Of course it did not went unnoticed, that the invincibly superheroine, whose escape from a local prison had been in the news a few days ago, wore *handcuffs* during their arrival, and a young doctor dared to ask.

“Don’t get me wrong, Supergirl. I’m a big fan of yours and this man owes you his life, but can’t you really take those off?” Kara, who had always valued honesty, fought a little fight with herself. But admitting, that she was indeed in a sense defeated by those “little devils” on her wrist, was against her Kryptonian pride.

“I am wearing these,” she declared, “because I promised to do so, ’till my innocence is publicly proved – it’s not a big deal.” Obviously the young man was not convinced and did not believe her, but at least it was a sensible explanation.

Meanwhile it was up to Diana to deal with the police forces, which had arrived shortly after Kara’s departure, and to take the credit for uncovering and blighting one of the most spectacular coupes initiated by Gotham’s honorable society.

She led the the officer’s to the hiding place Amba Kadiri and Poison Ivy. The container for transporting the villain was still usable and soon she was transferred into the latter. Up to now, Jim Gordon, who led the operation himself, had not mentioned Diana’s escape from a Gotham prison, but Diana was still upset about the circumstances of her arrest, and so she raised the topic herself.

“In case you haven’t watched the news, commissioner,” she said, when they were alone together, “I’ve recently been arrested for saving the lifes of some of your people. Is it custom in Gotham to offend the ones, who’re on the side of the law?” She asked with anger in her voice.

“No, Wonder Woman, it’s not,” Barbara’s father replied honestly, “and I re-

gret, what has been done to you and Supergirl and personally apologize for it.”

“Now, because we’ve saved your butts – that’s the way you call it?” Jim Gordon nodded, “you pretend, that it’s business as usual, but in a few days Supergirl and I will be on your most wanted list again.”

“Look, Wonder Woman, it’s beyond my powers to withdraw your names from the wanted list. Only a judge can do so, but the DA and I’ve at least taken care, that the two of you are only on the local list. So Supergirl and you are on the wanted list of the state, but you’re not on the nation-wide wanted list. E.g. nobody has the right or duty to arrest you here.”

“That’s very convenient, commissioner, isn’t it?” Diana asked cynically.

“Yes,” he admitted, “sometimes we’ve to act pragmatically. But if Supergirl and you cooperate, I think this little misunderstanding can be settled very soon.”

“I don’t attach importance to this, commissioner,” Diana replied dryly.

“I can understand this. Nevertheless, even if no official will repeat it,” Jim Gordon stated, “Let me personally say thanks for saving our butts, Wonder Woman.”

This way they departed. Poison Ivy and Amba Kadiri were finally transferred to the high-security prison in Metropolis with only a slight delay from schedule. But although the Gotham Press, which had reported in big letters about the fugitive heroines, made a U-turn and praised them for their action, Kara and Diana remained on the local wanted list.

Chapter 7

Catching the Cat

Barbara had not been dormant while her friends saved the day. Reflecting, what she knew about her fellow heroines public arrest, she found out, that Kara and she had overlooked a minor detail.

Barbara used her lunch break to drive to the prison where Kara and Diana had been held. According to Kara's narrative, she had been *cuffed* and released by a police officer and to achieve the latter, he must have had the key to 'her' *handcuffs*.

The detail she was sure, her fellow heroine had overlooked, concerned the construction of these *handcuffs*. Modern *handcuffs* or even her *bat-cuffs* had a ratchet-type closure. They required no keys to slap them on a prisoner's wrists.

If the double locks were not set, which required the keys, those could be opened by squeezing the ratchets to the zero position, which was of course impossible as long, as they encircled a wrist.

But 'Aphrodite's *Bracelets*' were different. They required a key, as far as they knew a very unique key, not only for

opening, but also for locking the *bracelets*. Therefore not the arresting lieutenant, but the captain, who had locked them on Kara at the police headquarter, had been definitely the last one, they knew for sure must have had this key in his possession.

A few phone calls told her, who it was and that he was still on duty. Sighing Barbara dispensed also her lunch in order to meet him. Soon, she was convinced, that he was a honest man and in no way related to Catwoman. He remembered it very well and told her frankly, that he had put this particular key into the internal mail in order to transfer it to the prison.

So there was a not negligible likelihood, that it may simply be there, and indeed, it turned out, that the dubious matron had not even lied to Kara. As the devil might have wanted, the key had arrived an hour after their intake, right after the escape of the two superheroines.

In the turmoil afterwards, the arrival of the key had not received any attention, and it had ended up in an office

drawer. When she drove back, in order to resume her duties, Barbara had the priceless piece of metal safely in her pocket.

“Important information!!! My place, today 8 PM, Babs,” she wrote Kara an electronic message about the good news.

The Adventures of her fellow-heroines filled the afternoon news already. Diana received most of the credit for saving the day. Kara was mentioned, but no recent pictures of her were shown. Barbara guessed, that her friend was presumably not very fond to pose in front of a camera, while wearing her ‘her’ *bracelets*.

She was surprised, that Diana accompanied Kara, when the latter showed up in the evening. Barbara, who knew her well, could see, that Kara was in a bad mood. More than once she tugged on the short *chain*, that held her wrists together. For Barbara, who knew better than anyone else, what Kara could do, it was still unbelievable, that the small piece of metal was completely unimpressed by this assault of super-human forces.

“What’s so important, Babs?” Her friend asked, after they had exchanged greetings. “You made up a big mystery.”

“Well, maybe it’s not much. But while you two saved the world, I’ve used my brain and drawn some conclusions,” Barbara enjoyed to keep them on suspense.

“Well,” Diana replied seriously, “I wouldn’t say, we save the world, but I think, Kara and I did a fairly good job.”

“Doubtlessly you did,” Barbara replied with a mischievous smile. “Not, that it is important,” she added, “but you

could have mentioned, that the whole reconnaissance was done by someone else.”

“Sorry, Babs,” Kara admitted, “we should have done so. But that’s not the reason, why you called for this meeting?”

“No, it’s not, of xourse,” Barbara replied, “but since the humble police Sargent Barbara Gordon has spent her complete spare time for two weeks on it without being credited, I think, the two of you owe me something on this behalve.”

“Acknowledged,” Kara replied earnestly and Diana nodded agreement.

“Good,” Barbara said and fixed Kara with her eyes, before she continued, “what would you do, if I could provide you with a key, that fits to ‘your’ *bracelets*?”

“REALLY?” Kara asked and Barbara nodded. “I’d say, that I owe you a REALLY big favor,” Kara stated seriously, “Bab’s do you really have the key to these?” She asked. “I’d have never believed, that I’d ever say this, but they drive me crazy.”

“So it would be a big favor – like putting a definite end to the criminal career of this Catwoman?” Barbara asked. “I don’t want to buy a pig in a poke.”

“Yes, it would be,” Kara confirmed her promise, “Babs, you can’t imagine, how much I’m longing for using my hands the way I want again.” Barbara smiled.

“Well under this condition we should give this one a try,” she said and produced the tiny, but odd looking little safety-type-key she had acquired during her spare time. “Give me your hands.”

Eagerly Kara extended her joined wrists, and Barbara inserted the key into

the key hole of one of the *bracelets*. At least it fitted quite well. She had the impression, that the key made a small clockwise movement before it allowed a rotation in the other direction, but this might have been an error of perception. However a full turn anti-clockwise produced the desired and wistfully awaited result, when the first *bracelet* finally popped open.

Kara immediately pulled her wrist out of its long-term confinement and rubbed it with her other hands. "A big thanks to the Gods of Krypton," she said. Her fellow heroines felt, what a load this had been on her mind, "and to you too, Babs," she added. "Where did you find it?"

"Well actually it was very simple." Barbara replied truthfully, "Actually, I got it from a drawer in an office of the prison you two escaped from. It must have arrived, just after you escaped."

"But I would not have looked there, Babs," Kara admitted, "not in a hundred years and the perspective to wear them so long was truly frightening. Could you please undo the other one too?" Barbara nodded and a few seconds later Kara was completely free for the first time in days.

"This was definitely an important message," Kara hugged Barbara carefully with respect to her human constitution, "and if you wish, I will help you to catch this Catwoman in order to make sure, that she does not annoy you anymore."

"That would be fair," Barbara said, "but be aware, that the Kitty-Cat must not be underestimated, although she's presumably only human. Remember, that

it was most likely Catwoman, who managed to decorate you with those *bracelets*."

"I'm aware of this and I'll be careful," Kara promised. "Since you found out – and I agree on that, that it was presumably her, who arranged Diana's and my arrest, it's also of interest to me to teach her a lesson. Therefore this is not really a favor. However there's something I don't understand..." She looked at her friend.

"Go ahead," Barbara encouraged her knowing, that Kara would do anyway.

"Well, Batman and you have fought her more than once. You know Batman very well, and he's quite capable. Why haven't you asked him to support you?"

"I want to tell you the truth," Barbara replied cautiously, "Batman seem's to be a little bit soft on her during the last few months. He agrees with me in principal, that she's a criminal, who belong's behind bars. But, when it comes to take action against her, he tell's me, that there're more important crimes to be solved, and once he said, that she's not really a criminal. It's almost, as if she's bewitched him."

"I understand," Kara replied, although she felt, she did not understand, what Barbara wanted to say. "Maybe there's something else, we could do?"



"There's just a minor thing," Barbara told her fellow heroines almost conversationally. "There's still a warrant for the arrest of the two of you, you know, and as a police officer it is my duty to arrest you."

“WHAT?” Diana, who had kept quiet so far, exclaimed. “If you think, I’ll let me being arrested again, you’ve to be nuts.”

“Not so fast, Diana,” Kara said. “Since all the facts have been presented already. This would be just a formal requirement to confirm our innocence officially.”

“That’s right, Kara,” Barbara added. “I suggest, you take yourselves in and argue, that you had to escape in order to do, what you just did. I will testify on your behalves, and you will walk away as spotless citizens without a criminal record.”

“I don’t care about a criminal record.” Diana said firmly. “The last time I tried to come to terms with human law, I got almost rotten in solitary confinement.”

“But I freed you after just two hours,” Kara replied, “and I would not like the two of us having a criminal record.”

“Do, what you have to do, but keep me out of this,” Diana was still upset.

“I’d like you to do it on my behalf, Diana,” Kara said. “If it’s Barbara, who’ll arrest you and me, what can go wrong?”

“You mean, it will be her, who should put *handcuffs* on me?” Diana asked.

“*Handcuffs*, you can shred anytime,” Kara replied knowing her feelings. “But suggest you don’t without an emergency.”

“Nevertheless, I still don’t like the idea to be *handcuffed*,” Diana objected.

“But you liked the idea to take all the glory,” Barbara remarked bitterly. Silence occurred. Nobody wanted to say anything. All arguments had been exchanged.

“You’re right,” Diana admitted after a moment, “this was careless, and I it was

not my intention to damage our comradeship. If it has to be, you may pick the place and time to arrest both of us.”

“How about here and now?” Diana sighed, but was bound by her promise.

“Do your duty then,” she said and extended her wrist in front. Barbara fetched a pair of regular *hinged handcuffs*, which belonged to her service equipment.

“Okay, but don’t damage those,” she said to Diana, while she closed the ratchets on her wrists. “I’ll have to pay for those, if you scrap them.” She had deliberately omitted the obligate request to lock Diana’s hands behind her back.

“I promise to be careful,” Diana said.

“I guess, the same applies to me,” Kara said, raised herself and extended her wrists in close proximity in front, too.

“Right,” Barbara replied, “except, that I don’t want to lead you into the temptation to scrap my *cuffs*.” She fetched the discarded “Bracelets of Aphrodite”.

“Is it really necessary?” Kara asked, but did not retrieve her hands. “After all I got rid of them only a few minutes ago.”

“It wouldn’t be the real thing else,” Barbara answered, while she locked them on Kara’s wrists. “I’ll give my dad a phone call, in order to send us a car to take us to the headquarters, where you’ll be booked in and presented to the judge, who’ll set you free. Any objections?” Kara and Diana both in *handcuffs* shook their heads.

This way it was done. Jim Gordon decided, that the arrest of the two super heroines should be managed as discretely as possible, and so a single Sargent arrived

with a police cruiser ten minutes later. He was awed by the sight of two superheroines in *handcuffs* awaiting them.

“Very impressive, isn’t it, Charly,” Barbara greeted him in uniform, “I was as surprised as you’re now, when Supergirl and Wonder Woman knocked at my door. They want to be arrested to prove their innocence and clear their record.”

“Yeah, Barbara,” he said, “I guess I’ve never driven so prominent passengers.” He did not dare to say prisoners.

“Oh, Supergirl and Wonder Woman are VERY cooperative,” Barbara said she smiled, “but you’re right, it doesn’t happen every day, that someone like them knocks on a simple sargent’s door. I guess, over the whole excitement I forgot to double lock Wonder Woman’s *cuffs*. Would you like to do it? She doesn’t bite.”

“Really? Eh,... Miss Wonder Woman, would you...” Reluctantly Diana gave him access to her wrists. She was furious. If stares could kill, her’s would have killed Barbara, while Kara grinned. She had divulged Diana’s weakness to Barbara.

The Sargent inserted the cap of his *handcuff* key into the corresponding holes of Diana’s *cuffs* and engaged the double locks, Barbara had omitted on purpose.

“Thank you, Sargent,” Diana managed to say with a smile. Right afterwards she sent a very black look to Barbara.

“I’m honored, Miss Wonder Woman,” the sargent replied, “you’ll be my most prominent passengers ever.” Barbara noted with satisfaction, that Diana pulled at her *handcuffs* immediately, after he

turned away from her – to no avail. Her superhuman strength was gone.

The Sargent opened the back doors of his cruiser widely and gallantly supported both superheroines with their entrance. He acted more like chauffeur to his prominent guests than a police officer performing an arrest. Barbara could not criticize her colleague, since this was precisely his advertised rôle in this case.

Both superheroines were not brought to the booking area, but directly to Jim Gordon’s office with Barbara in tow.

“Sorry for the inconvenience, ladies,” Jim Gordon said, “it’s this political correctness issues, that require us to *handcuff* all our prisoners independent of their gender and the crimes they are accused of. May I nevertheless offer you a cup of coffee. The coffee here is not so bad as its reputation.” Diana and Kara agreed, and Barbara was offered a cup of coffee, too.

When the secretary, who had served the coffee, had left the room Jim Gordon declared. “While you were driven here, I’ve talked to the D.A. He’s already dropped all charges against you. If none of you objects, you’ll be driven to court directly from here and the judge will set you free immediately. I’ve also heard, that the mayor will hold a press conference right afterwards, in which he will apologize publicly for the obviously wrong accusations against the two of you.”

“Thanks, commissioner,” Kara said. She sipped on her coffee, holding the cup gracefully in her joined hands. Diana’s handling of her cup of coffee was less

graceful. She had somewhat less experience than Kara in doing things *handcuffed*, and the *hinged* joint of her *cuffs* made the task of holding the cup not easier.

“Don’t thank me, Supergirl,” Jim Gordon replied, “it’s the mayor, who will apologize. I’ve invited both of you just to say thanks for your brave and very successful action against the most recent assault on law and order in this city. Without your intervention this could easily have been a disaster for Gotham’s police.”

“It was a pleasure for us to help you, commissioner,” Kara replied. “Actually, it has always been a pleasure to help you, because you’re a brave and honest man, and I think – no, I know for sure, it was you, who convinced the mayor to apologize.”

“I’ve just reminded him about, what the two of you’ve done for this city. It was his idea...” Kara interrupted him.

“Diana and I know, who are the honest people in this town, commissioner, and I can assure you, that we’ll continue to support them, despite this misunderstanding.” She raised her wrist. The piece of *chain* between them jingled softly.

“Thank’s for your kind understanding, ladies,” he replied relieved, “let me know, if I can do something legal for you.”

“I don’t think so,” Kara replied, but Diana used the opportunity to object.

“Sir, your daughter has made these a little bit tight,” she raised her *cuffed* hands for everyone to see, “maybe you can convince her to loosen them a little bit?”

“Of course, Wonder Woman,” Jim Gordon replied. “Barbara, would you...?”

“I would like to, Daddy,” Barbara reacted quickly, “but I’ve to visit the loo VERY urgently – too much coffee, you know. Could you do it for me? Here’s the key.” She reached him the *handcuff* key and left without waiting for an answer.

Jim Gordon loosened Diana’s *handcuffs*, which were not too tight at all, each by one notch, which was still too tight to slip her hands out and Diana thanked him, while Kara grinned behind his back.

“You, too, Supergirl?” The commissioner asked. Obviously he had not recognized, that Kara’s *cuffs* were different.

“No, mine are perfect,” Kara replied resigned, “there’s no danger, that I accidentally rip them off.” Since he was not aware, what difficulties these ‘*bracelets*’ had caused Kara, he did not have a chance to catch the true sense of her words, before Barbara returned and led them out.

“You’re a beast,” Diana said with distaste, when the three of them were alone.

“Because those make you only human?” Barbara replied not bare of any logic, “I’m only human all the time.”

“It’s not about being human,” Diana explained referring to the history of her race, “we’ve been kept like this for centuries. Those *bracelets* we use as weapons now, are a reminder to the days, when they were used to *shackle* us. Every Amazon fears to fall back into those times.”

“In half an hour you’ll be rid of those,” Barbara replied, “it’s not a big deal.” And she was right. The judge simply declared all charges raised against them as wrongfully raised. Afterwards they were re-

leased from their *restraints* and flew away.



Three days later, Barbara and Kara met and made plans, how to catch the notorious Cat. The opportunity was good, because Rupert Morgan, a favorite victim of the Cat, had announced his annual charity auction, and in the last two years the Cat had shown up every time and stolen something valuable. Therefore he had asked Gotham police for protection, and after some pleading Jim Gordon had delegated this job to his daughter.

Barbara knew, that the Cat had fooled many colleagues and her own experiences in dealing with Catwoman were also not very promising. But with Kara and her unique abilities as a backup she was determined to change this once and forever.

This time half a dozen old and valuable pictures should be auctioned. The last time the Cat had stroke before the auction, so that the whole event had to be called off, but in the year before, she had captured the fully loaded delivery van right after the auction and all the already sold objects had been stolen, before they could be delivered to their new owners.

Guarding the whole event was not an easy task for just one officer, who was more or less just an enforcement of the private security agency hired by Morgan anyway in order to protect the event.

Barbara interpreted her rôle not as intended as a contact officer, but took part in the preparations. Additional sensors

from Batman's versatile arsenal were installed, but as the by far most efficient measure without knowledge of her superiors she convinced Morgan to accept a disguised Kara introduced as a civil cop as an enforcement of his security agents.

Barbara pondered her head, what the Cat intended to do. Even without Kara there was enough firepower to sink a battleship. This time Morgan had actually invested a substantial part of the cost of the whole show in security measures.

But, when the attack started, almost all of their elaborate preparations were more or less useless against it. A gaseous narcotic was released with enough pressure to reach everyone in the treasure chamber, before an alert could be raised.

A later investigation confirmed, that not even gas mask could have protected the security men, because a new narcotic gas, a top secret invention sponsored by the army had been used, which enfolded its impact by absorption over the skin.

What Catwoman understandably had not taken into account was, that Kara's physiology was different and did not react on the narcotic as intended. Directly after an audible *plop* everyone in the room went down. Kara followed immediately pretending to have been affected too.

A few seconds later a panel in the roof was opened, and there she was – the Cat. A gas-tight version of the famous catsuit covered her body which slid down along a rope. Quickly she looked around, before she headed for the encased pictures. Effortless she opened the first encasement

and disregarded it, then the second...

Kara had observed all this through her almost closed eyelids. When Selina turned her back on her. She raised herself with super-speed and assumed position behind the unsuspecting cat-burglar.

However Selina had either felt the air drag of this movement inspite her protective suit, or her legendary cat senses had warned her. She turned around, and she reacted fairly quick for a human. A clenched fist would have made a deep impact into Kara's stomach if she were human. But Selina could as well have rammed her fist against a block of steel.

While her fist hurt like hell – luckily for her it was only sprained not broken – Kara had no difficulty to sweep her legs away. And before Selina could move, she used super-speed again to remove her mask. When her skin was exposed to the narcotic gas, Selina lost consciousness, as everyone else had, except for Kara.

"Got her," she briefed Barbara by the secure radio provided by Batman.

"Any casualties?" Barbara asked.

"Everyone except me is unconscious," Kara replied. She looked around, "but they seem to be okay. It may be not wise, when you open the door from outside."

"OK," Barbara replied. "How to hell did she do it? There was no alert, nothing." Kara did not answer. "Anyhow, if I can't get in, can you get her out, Kara?"

"She came through an airway. I guess, I can take this way, too," Kara replied, "let's meet on the roof." Thanks to her ability to fly this was a sensible place.

"I'll be there in five minutes," Barbara

replied and closed the connection. Because the building was very high, this was an optimistic estimate, but she did it.

"There she is," Kara greeted her with triumph in her voice. "Your Catwoman caught and captured red-handed."

"Selina Kyle," Barbara adressed the unconscious woman, "that will make a nice long sentence, but before you'll tell us everything about your intentions."

"Can you have a look at her, while I fetch something to carry her?" Kara asked, refering to the unmasked captive.

"Sure," Barbara replied with a grin.

"Be careful," Kara warned her, "she's damned fast for a human." The Kryptonian disappeared. Five minutes later she was back with a sack sufficiently large to encase an average-sized woman's body.

"She's lock pins in her boots and clothes," Barbara explained to Kara the reason, why she had taken Selina's clothes off except for her underpants. She was just about to slap her *bat-cuffs* 'model C' around the unconscious woman's wrists, when her Kryptonian friend intervened.

"I have a better idea," Kara said and produced the *Adamant bracelets*, she had kept, after Barbara had released her from their grip. "These will look fine on her, and I bet, she can't take them off either."

The *circlets* closed with a distinctive click on the feline's wrists behind her back and a turn of the odd little key sealed Catwoman's fate. Still unconscious she was put into the sack, and Kara carried her effortless away through the air.

Chapter 8

The Perils of Catwoman

The narcotic was quite effective. Back in Barbara's flat, Kara had enough time to go through Barbara's rich equipment in order to enforce Selina's *restraints* up to the level, that deemed her necessary to hold the famous cat-burglar securely.

A collar with a *chain* leash turned to the back and affixed to the connecting *chain* of her *bracelets* prevented any attempt to bring her hands to the front, and a pair of male sized *bat-cuffs* went on her slender ankles for additional protection.

When Selina regained consciousness, she noticed, that she was naked except for her underpants and the aforementioned *restraints*, which secured her wrists and ankles. Kara, now back in her famous superheroine outfit observed her.

The feline realized immediately, that she was closely *shackled*. Her hands carefully examined the *rings* holding her wrists prisoner and the *chain* arrangement holding them behind her back. She also estimated the freedom of her legs, before she slowly opened her eyes and revealed

to her captor, that she was conscious. In particular the *cuffs* on her ankles were not very encouraging. The Cat knew, she would not get very fast very far.

It was just the moment, when Barbara, who had delegated everything, she could in order to clarify, what had happened at Morgan's charity party to her colleagues, pretending, that she was following a hot trace, which was more or less the truth, finally arrived at her own flat.

"Kitty-Cat's just awake," Kara greeted her and they turned both to their opponent, who slowly raised herself to her knees, which was all she could do, pretending to have just realized her bonds.

"You two must be very scared or very kinky to truss a small woman up like this," she remarked, indicating her *fetters*. To her horror she recognized, that her worst fears had become true, when she caught a sight of the *bracelets* on her wrists. She had tried every trick she knew to open those without the key, after she had acquired them, and so she knew all to well,

that she had no hope to achieve this now.

“That’s just a small tribute to your reputation, Miss Kyle, or should I call you Catwoman,” Barbara retorted.

“You came up with such unsustainable allegations before, police-sargent Barbara Gordon,” Selina replied, revealing, that she was aware of Batgirl’s identity, too. “And right now, you are holding me prisoner without justification. I am...”

“You’re a notorious thief, caught red-handed by Supergirl and me, and this time we will prove everything, Kitty-Cat. You’ve the right to remain silent until...”

“I know the text, I was arrested by you before with big news-coverage,” Selina interrupted her, “unjustifiably arrested.”

“We both know, that you deserve a few years in prison.” Barbara replied, “and this time, you’ll get and serve them.”

“What for?” Selina asked. “I’ve just corrected some injustice, and you know that. I’m no less a criminal than you’re!”

“You dare to say this?” Barbara was about to slap her in the face, but Kara gripped her arm, before she could do so.

“Don’t let yourself be provoked, Babs. This is not the time to balance bills.”

“Take these off,” Selina interrupted her, indicating her close *shackles*, “and we can settle it immediately, just the two of us, the Bat and the Cat, here and now.”

“Anywhere and anytime,” Barbara replied heftily. She was in heat, too.

“But not now and not here,” Kara interrupted, “we know about those *bracelets*, which you are wearing right now. What we want to know is, how you acquired

them and who hired you in order to put me and Wonder Woman out of the way.”

“I don’t know, what you mean.”

“Listen, Kitty-Cat,” Kara said, “you can tell me these two facts and get away with just an intentioned robbery...”

“She must not walk away almost for free...” Barbara exclaimed in fury.

“Walk away with, what we can prove,” Kara continued, “or I will destroy the only key to those.” She threatened showing her the tiny key to her freedom.

“It’s indestructible,” Selina replied.

“So you know this,” Kara retorted, “Look, Kitty-Cat, I’m Supergirl, I can put it into the center of the sun, could scuttle it in the ocean of Europe or put it on a view other places you even can’t imagine, where nobody can retrieve it from...”

“What’s this?” Selina interrupted her – she was not easy to be fooled, “the Krypton version of ‘Good cop, bad cop?’”

“On Krypton we didn’t play games, Kitty-Cat,” Kara replied, “it’s as simple as this: You give me the information, I want and I let you off the the hook, or you’re stuck with your pretty prey for the rest of your life. I can imagine, that it’ll make escaping from prison much harder.”

“You can’t do this...” There was a tiny bit of tremor in the tough woman’s voice, only a tiny bit, but for Kara’s extremely fine senses this was clearly audible.

“I CAN do this, Kitty-Cat, and I will do so. I always get what I want. Think about it, I give you exactly one hour, before I want an answer. In the mean time, the two of you can settle your little dif-

ferences,” Kara said and left the flat.

Selina was shocked by this formidable threat, she could not deny it. But she managed to stay cool – she had always managed to stay cool – and she had a plan.

“Hey, Bat-Brat, where are my clothes? I will file a complain about you for false arrest, kidnapping and sexual harassment,” she tried to provoke Barbara.

“Who says, that we are going to take you to prison, Kitty-Cat?” Barbara had quickly learned from Kara. “You’d escape within hours. I’m tired of hunting you. We think about keeping you as a pet.”

“Want to put me in this harness of yours?” Selina pursued her strategy.

“Who told you about the harness?” The realization, that her arch-enemy knew one of her most intimate secrets, was an unpleasant surprise for Barbara.

“Nobody. I was here and investigated your flat,” Selina celebrated her unlawfully acquired knowledge. “Besides, your security system is not even mediocre. I know everything about your double life – and your kinky preferences,” she claimed.

“You are a thief and a notorious liar,” Batgirl retorted, “nobody will believe you.” But she went pale and her voice revealed, that she was really shocked.

“But I have water-tight proofs and the society of Gotham will find it – let’s say – interesting, that Jim Gordon’s daughter is Batgirl – and kinky,” Selina threatened.

“What about putting you into this harness and taking a few photos?” Barbara tried to regain the upper hand.

“I can’t stop you, I am naked and

chained hand and food – and you long for seeing me in the harness, don’t you?” Selina asked almost seducingly.

“If you know it, you can wear it with a leash, Kitty-Cat” Barbara said firmly, “we can start your pet training right now.”

A hairpin hidden in her underwear and overlooked by Kara had opened the way for Selina’s escape. In seconds deft fingers had picked the padlock fixing the intractable *chain* connecting ‘Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*’ to her leash, and successively she had also been able to unlock the allegedly escape-proof *bat-cuffs* on her ankles.

Altogether these remarkable accomplishments had been a matter of less than ten minutes. Nevertheless the Cat had pretended successfully to be helplessly bound, as long as Supergirl was around.

After Kara had left and Barbara went to fetch her harness, Selina brought her hands to the front in a fluent move, the connecting *chain* taught. This did not cause a noise perceptible to human ears.

Selina had to accept, that *braceletted* like now, she was no match for the highly trained Batgirl. But when she got her joined hands on a paperweight, the unsuspecting heroine had no chance to react. The capped glass sphere hit her in the back of her head and the lights went out.

Selina immediately took a set of *binged bat-cuffs* out of Barbara’s utility belt. She removed her enemy’s blouse and bra and clicked them down on the unconscious crime-fighters wrists behind her back.

“This makes us equal,” she muttered, regarding her forcefully connected hands.

She also removed her utility belt, and boots, and disrobed her of her clothes as well as of most of her lock-picking tools.

Her pants came in handy, because they fitted Selina as well. The ball-gag and the harness, Barbara had devoted to her, also found another receiver – revenge was sweet. She expertly applied these items to the senseless woman. She had estimated the circumference of Barbara’s ankles right. The now superfluous pair of over sized *bat-cuffs* fitted around them as well, and interlinked with the ones already on her wrists they formed a very strict and acceptably secure *steel* hog tie.

Batgirl was still without conscience. Teasing her long-term enemy was a great temptation, but the hour was almost over and Selina had concluded, that it would be better not to wait for Kara’s return.

She removed her mask, wrapped a towel around her upper body, hiding ‘her’ *bracelets* behind a corner of the latter and disappeared on the streets of Gotham. She had done well to hurry. Three minutes after her departure, Kara returned.

“You are a really fine guardian,” Kara greeted her fellow heroine, who was about to regain conscience. “Kitty-Cat’s gone. She’s taken the ‘Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*’ with her, and you are holding siesta.” She removed Barbara’s gag.

“This malicious animal must have hit me from behind. I’ve a damned big headache,” Barbara complained in vain.

“That happens only to too credulous people, someone told me recently.”

“This could have happened to every-

one. She must have picked the locks of her *restraints*, while you were around.”

“I doubt it. However, if we are lucky, Kitty-Cat will do no better with these *bracelets*, than I did – that’s what I hope, and this means, she’ll have to return in order to get this little key,” she remarked, dangling it in front of Barbara’s face.

“Apropos keys, I keep a spare set to those behind the baking soda in the upper left door of the kitchen cell,” Barbara remarked indicating her own *shackles*.

“Maybe tomorrow morning, Babs.” Kara replied with a grin and Barbara’s facial color faded. “Revenge is sweet.”

“You can’t leave me like this,” Barbara protested, although she knew very well, that Kara could and might indeed do so.

“No, I can help you to sit,” Kara mocked, “and I think I might find a collar and a leash to complement your outfit.”

“Don’t dare to do that, or...” she began well aware, that this was an empty threat.

“Don’t make promises you cannot hold,” Kara cut her speech and so she was able to enjoy her very own *restraints* and harness. Two hours after sunset, Kara freed a grumpy Batgirl from her hogtie and declared the bill closed, a point of view Barbara was not willing to share.

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Without being recognized or drawing attention Selina reached one of her secret hiding places. Equipped with a mattress, a minimum of dresses, food for six weeks, not tasteful, but eatable, and all

the tools of her profession, it contained everything, she needed right now.

Only very few people knew about the small bunker built ages ago, and nobody was aware, that Catwoman had moved in some time ago. The most important objects of desire were a bra and a tank top. Next she checked for lock-picks. A well-preserved set in working condition was available. Immediately she started to work on the locks of 'her' new *bracelets*.

Actually Catwoman was not very confident, that she would be able to open them at all, because she had tried this many times without the inconvenience of having her own wrists enclosed by those tightly fitting *circlets* – without success.

However, today she tried for three hours, before she took a break. Futilely her wrist fought the *chain*, that forced them to stay in close proximity. She considered her plight. The prospect, that she might not be able to remove those from her wrists for a long time – maybe forever – had something truly frightening even to someone as tough as Selina Kyle.

Three days she spent with other fruitless attempts to get rid of the unloved 'jewelry', before she admitted the defeat to herself and left her hiding place. Formally she was well dressed. Tennis shoes, white socks, hot-pants, not too hot, but emphasizing her long and well trained legs and the tank-top hinting at a well-formed pair of firm breasts. Silver sparkling, reflective sunglasses hid her eyes, eyes, that looked still clear. No tears had found their way down her face, yet –

Selina was a REALLY tough woman.

A small purse containing some money and tools hid the unbreakable *chain* joining what appeared to the casual observer as a matching pair of black *bracelets*.

The neighborhood around her hiding place was naturally not one of Gotham's finest addresses, so some care was necessary, and up to now Selina had managed to avoid trouble with her professional knowledge, how to behave here.

However, just this day she ran accidentally into a young man, who might be recognized as a gang member on first sight by every rookie-cop of the 4th precinct. An attractive, well dressed young woman was not, what he suspected to see here, but obviously this was something, he could acquire taste for, if this creature was able to develop taste at all.

Quickly a knife appeared in his hand, which Selina immediately judged to be the crooks most valuable possession.

"What do we have here, babe, got lost?" His crabby smile disclosed, that dental hygiene had no priority for him.

"Put that knife down, boy, and I might let you go," Selina replied calmly.

"Wow, a little girl with a big mouth," he approached her regarding her as a prey, not as a risk to his own health. That was his first mistake. Selina dropped her purse and he stared at the *handcuffs* on the young woman's wrists. He stared a second too long – that was his second mistake. A well aimed kick hit him hard into the guts with painful consequences .

Before he was able to sense something

else, his knee was smashed by another kick and the knife he had lost during this attack was snatched by Selina's right hand, which moved in perfect although enforced synchronicity with her left one.

He did neither have the time nor was in the mood to admire the grace of her movements. He went down and a last kick against his chin robbed him of his ability to make his own dispositions for some time. Selina struck his knife into a groove on the board way broke the blade, and threw the remaining parts to the ground next to his unconscious form.



The Cat looked around, her breath already at normal level. Nobody seemed to have noticed the incident. She raised the discarded purse with her joined hands and made the *chain* disappear behind it. Assuming a normal pace she left her would be attacker behind. She finally reached a telephone in the middle of nowhere and dialed a secret number.

"It's me, the Cat," she simply said. "I'm in need of help – I'll pay for it."

"Police?" a moil voice on the other end of the line inquired. "Batman or one of those other caped won'na-be heroes?"

"No, a metallurgical problem." She explained. "A truly extraordinary one. I need a REALLY good expert who can cut a small piece of indestructible metal, without heating it up to a thousand degrees."

"I beg your pardon, but to me t'is sounds like a contradiction in terms." Her

invisible interlocutor sounded confused. "What did you really acquire?"

"I know," she admitted without disclosing any details. "It is, what it is, and nothing, I want to sell. I need help."

"Anyway, you can pay?" He asked the obligatory and most important question.

"Of course," she replied, it was a *conditio sine qua none*, "but only in case of success. I don't pay for unfinished work."

"The one I would rely on is Howard Wilson," her correspondent suggested, "but he will see money first, you know."

"I know him, well actually only his reputation," she conceded. "Anyway, he's good – how much does he want?"

"His usual fair is fifty-thousand bucks plus expenses for taking the job and the same amount in case of success." This was not the figure, she had hoped for.

"I don't have this much." It was the plain truth. Half of it had been her limit.

"Then you have to deal with Harry Bernsen," he made another suggestion.

"Tin can Harry?" She was not enthusiastic. The guy he had recommended, was a safe cracker, whose abilities had never been able to catch up with her own ones.

"The same," the voice confirmed.

"No thanks." She had made a quick decision. "I'll take Mabuse. Contact him. When, do you think, he can be here?"

"And the salary?" The man asked. "He can turn nasty, if he doesn't get paid."

"I'll get the money, provided his expenses don't exceed five-thousand," she said, although she did not know right now, how to keep up with this promise.

“Okay, then it can be arranged,” her correspondent sounded satisfied. “Actually it’s your choice. Where and when?”

“The old storehouse in Finnegan’s street,” she replied after a few seconds of thinking, “in four days after sunset.”

Howard Wilson AKA Mabuse had been a top rated material scientist, who had suffered terribly from Kryptonite radiation generated in a secret government experiment. All, which remained of him, was his brain, which by now should be embedded into a life-cell protected by some Kryptonian super metal. However, he had used his knowledge to create a cyborg body with a Kryptonite power source and remarkable capabilities.

The latter had looked quite similar to Metallo, but with tentacles instead of normal extremities. Stronger and more flexible than anything else, enhanced by a formidable arsenal of weapons and tools. It had been a formidable appearance.

However, the modified Kryptonite radiation had also damaged Howard Wilson’s brain and turned a formerly polite and cautious man into a power crazy demolition machine, who called himself Dr. Mabuse after a still famous movie figure.

The public sometimes called him Metallo 2.0, and he had delivered Superman a tough fight. The latter had finally been able to trash his Cyborg body, but had not killed him. There were rumors, that Mabuse had recovered from this and was preparing for another clash with the uncrowned king of all superheroes, but only few people had seen him and noth-

ing was known for sure, except that he was acquiring money presumably for further enforcing his rebuild Cyborg body.

Selina was not amused about the price, he demanded. Fifty-five thousand bucks was all, she could mobilize within four days, and even this would be difficult with those *bracelets* on her hands. After all she could not walk into a bank, sign for it and leave with a pair of *handcuffs* in place.

Under considerable difficulties she had been able to fetch forty-eight thousand by collecting everything, she could get, from her hiding places, luckily without compromising herself. The rest ought to be obtained by dissolving an account, she had created under a wrong identity.

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“Fifty bucks, Harry. You go in, show the signed authorization and bring the money to me.” A check about 7.145 bucks and an order of disclosure were on the table between them. Harry knew the woman in the black poncho – not her real name, but he knew what this woman could do. She had called him offering fifty bucks for a ten minutes job without risk.

Among the local crooks the Cat had the reputation of being a honest trader. Harry was no hero, just a man who wanted to survive without working too much, and Selina knew this as well.

“Why can’t you go yourself?” He asked cautiously. “It’s really not a trap?”

“No it’s not. Honestly, Harry, everything’s clean and strictly legal. I can’t go because of these.” She lifted the garment.

“You are *handcuffed*?” White open eyes stared at ‘her’ *chain-linked bracelets*.

“That’s quite obvious,” she said dryly.

“Eh..., why don’t you simply pick them?” He dared to ask. “Everyone says, you are the best lock-picker in town.”

“Yes,” she conceded, “but I can’t pick these and no, they can’t be cut off either.”

“Wow. Who put them on you?” She did not want to discuss this matter.

“That’s not your business,” she replied harshly. “No questions, no talking, just collect it, and bring me the money.”

“Okay, okay.” He was about to leave.

“Harry!” Her voice held him back.

“Yeah,” he replied nervously.

“Don’t get crude ideas. You know, I can tear you into peaces, even with these *bracelets* on my hands, and, Harry, I’ll do so, if...” She did not have to say more.

“I know, I know,” he replied, went, fetched the money and received his fine. Her reputation was still sufficient to impress crooks like Harry. But dealing with Mabuse was an entirely different matter.

She did not have enough to pay him, at least in case he should be successful, and she did not want to waste a thought about the other case. If Mabuse couldn’t do it, she would be doomed anyway.

Mabuse was dangerous, even for her. Some preparations were necessary in order to prevent him hopefully from killing her, after he would have found out, that she was not able to pay him the rest.

Selina was desperate, but this did not make her incautious. If it should be necessary to fight Mabuse after getting rid of

‘her’ *bracelets*, the Cat wanted to be prepared as good as possible to do so.

Mabuse had been a formidable opponent for Superman once, and he ought to be an even more formidable opponent for her. The only feasible way to take him out of action, she could think of, was the application of electrical currents. Not the type of current used in an average household – much stronger currents, and Selina had an idea, how to obtain the latter.

Beneath the old storehouse was a high voltage transform station, where the current of a 100 MV ultra high voltage overhead transmission line was transformed to high voltage and distributed to several still formidable transmission lines. After the breakdown of the nuclear power plant, this line was on overload now and more important to Gotham than ever.

The old storehouse was still in working condition, although it had not been used over the last few years. But it had a working rail crane. In theory it should be possible to position something heavy above each point inside and drop it by remote control. Knowing both Selina’s mind had formed a plan, not one she immediately believed in, but one, which might work after reworking the details.

It was more difficult than expected to prepare the old storehouse for one woman working alone with only limited use of her hands. However Catwoman was well aware, that her life depended on it and therefore she bestowed great care in the preparations. Climbing and mechanical work had never been difficult

to her, but for the required kind of work the irremovable *handcuffs* imposed very inconvenient restrictions on every move.

Selina worked night and day, and on the day of schedule she was completely exhausted. But everything was well prepared and triple checked. Her chances were anything, but good according to her own optimistic judgement, but Selina was determined to take all, she could get.

Finally she was ready to confront Mabuse, as ready as anyone could be. She stared at 'her' *bracelets* and gave the connecting *chain* an angry tug. She had done this a hundred times before. It was useless, but reminded her, what was on stake.



"You've the money, cat?" Mabuse's question was as forthright, as could be expected. The huge metal body moved with a grace, that rivaled her own, although it out-weighted her by at least a ton.

"It's in the suitcase over there," Selina indicated the direction with a nod. A tentacle longed for it, grabbed the case and ripped it apart. He counted the money and stored it in one of his body holes.

"That's only half of it," he said lurking at her with extended tentacles. He reminded Selina of a snake in front its prey.

"The deal was, one halve for trying, the rest in case of success," she replied.

"Right. What's your problem?" Selina stood directly in front of the huge cyborg. She lifted her poncho, her favorite garment since her escape from Barbara's flat, a little bit. There was no way back now.

"It's these," she said raising her joined hands, referring to the *restraints*, which had caused her so much trouble. "I simply want them off, but without my hands being amputated or burned to ashes."

"You are *handcuffed*?" This was definitely not what he had expected. If his metal face had been capable of an expression he might have grinned. "That's funny. Someone's cropped the cat."

"That depends on the point of view," Selina replied calmly. "I cannot remove these on my own. You claim to be the 'Master of any Power'." She extended her wrists. "Show me, what you can do."

"You must be very desperate. A wild cat without claws is only a pussy cat," he stated. "I believe, you've already tried everything available to your limited resources. That might raise the price. I ask you again: Where's the rest of my money?" This crook had sensed the opportunity to hold her for ransom.

"May I remind you, that we've a deal and I've fulfilled my part. Up to now you've delivered nothing," Selina insisted.

"Maybe I should just take you with me, and keep you as a pussy cat." It was a joke, but the menace behind it was real.

"Maybe you're just a bigmouth and this is too difficult for you." She countered his suggestion offensively. "The birds in Gotham tell, you're not as powerful, as before Superman trashed you."

"I'm more powerful than ever," he gave back matter-of-factly with faith in it.

"Then show it." She said indicating, that she was willing to return to their

business. “Half the money, if you can snap this *chain*, the rest is for the *bracelets*.” She extended her *chain*-linked wrists again.

“Well, they suit you,” he said enjoying his position. “What if I prefer to let them on you? It may be worth the money.”

“Then everyone will know, that you are not trustworthy,” she said calmly.

“I don’t need ANYBODY. I do, what I like to do.” He was stubborn – and mean.

“But, I think, you need money,” she argued, “and NOBODY’ll make a deal with you, if it’s known, that you you collect money on promises and don’t deliver.”

“I want to see my money first,” he insisted. “Who knows, if you can pay?”

“Who knows, if you just want to kill me and collect the money. You got the first half. Now it’s your turn.” The Cat made clear, that it was not him, who dictated the rules. “Show what you can do.”

“You are a tough trader, Pussy Cat,” he finally gave in. “I like this. Give me your little claws, Pussy.” He grabbed ‘Selina’s’ *bracelets* with his tentacles. An immense force was building up, a blue laser beam originated from one of his body caves and another tentacle ignited a blue flame, which hit the same spot of her *wrist chain*.

Selina feared, that her bones would be shattered like glass, if the *chain* between her *bracelets* would suddenly disrupt. But it didn’t. Only the link he had attacked by the flame and laser seemed to show a silver sparkle, but no sign of weakening.

“That’s no normal metal, Pussy Cat. It doesn’t support electric currents; it’s

an insulator. However, it’s also incredibly tough. My tentacles will be damaged, if I apply more force.” She felt the immense tension disappear, although the power in his grip on ‘her’ *bracelets* might still have been sufficient to lift a railway wagon.

“What about your claim to be the ‘Master of all Powers’? I’ll give you all the money, if you just rip off the *chain*.”

“Sorry, Pussy Cat. I can’t do it. I’ve applied a plasma flame and a high energy laser in addition to mechanical power beyond your imagination. That peace of stuff is beyond my capabilities.” His facial lenses sparkled. “How did you get it?”

“That’s not your business.” Another tentacle gripped her throat. She knew, he might break her neck with a thought.

“Okay, I got it from Supergirl. It’s some Kryptonian super metal,” she made it sound anxious, but became cool as ice. Fear would not improve her situation.

“It’s NOT a Kryptonian super metal. My brain capsule is made from finest Kryptonian super metal, but it can in no way compete with this stuff.” Although Mabuse was a ruthless criminal, he was also a scientist, and the material of ‘her’ *bracelets* had made a big impression.

“I honestly don’t know, what it is. I only know, that I got them from Supergirl,” She provided a not entirely honest, but plausible short version of an answer.

“Where’s the rest of my money?” With his tentacle on her throat her bargaining position was not very strong.

“It’s in a shopping bag, but it’s secured with a firebomb, only I can deactivate.”

She prayed, he would believe this. The tentacle unwound itself from her throat.

“Very clever, Pussy Cat,” he admitted unwillingly. “Well, show me that bag.”

“It’s on the stage over there, but if you touch it, the money will burn to ashes.”

“Fine, you do it then for me, Pussy.”

“You’ve to release my hands first,” she reminded him, that he had affixed her.

“No, Pussy.” He produced a little silver *chain* out of another of his countless body-cavities, wound it around the indestructible *chain* connecting ‘her’ *bracelets* and welded two links together with his laser beam, so that she would not be able to remove it without a suitable tool.

“I beg your pardon, but I don’t trust you, Pussy,” he commented this measure.

“Okay, but you must let me go, once you’ve the money.” She cursed her temerity. This *chain* did not belong to her plan.

“Sure, Pussy, sure.” Selina had no doubt, that her survival was not something he seriously considered. His failure would become known and, although his metal face had no human expression, she had sensed his interest in inheriting the metal, he could not defeat as a bonus.

Right now, she was still alive, just because in his greed he intended to collect also the rest of the money – money, that had never existed at all. The immensely powerful grip on her *bracelets* loosened.

“Okay, Pussy Cat. Fetch the money for me, and it will be better for your health, if it’s not burned.” He gave her *chain* some slack and Selina climbed up to the top of the concrete stage with cat-like

grace.

“I’ve to put in a code,” she said. But in the bag was only the remote control for the rail crane. It was almost in position, but a slight adjustment had to be made. It paid off, that she had greased the rails. The movement caused almost no noise.

She was worried as hell about the *chain* connecting her to Mabuse, but what could she do? He would kill her anyway. Selina sent a silent prayer to the Lord. She did not do this very often, because she did not know, where he lived and, if he cared for this world at all. Then she pressed the button of the remote control and awaited, whatever might happen.

A thick copper cable was dropped onto Mabuse’s body and, a microsecond before it made physical contact, hell literally opened up its doors. Everything was on flame. The button had also triggered a magnetic switch, which redirected the full power of the big transmission line into the cable, an incredible bolt of lightning gripped for Mabuse’s cyborg-body.

Even the reportedly invincible body armour was not able to defeat the enormous amount of energy. The output of the transmission had even been increased due to the power plant break down, and now the power, destined to support half of Gotham City, floated through the cyborg’s body, which was literally melted.

Selina, who had instinctively closed her eyes, when she pulled the trigger, observed the result from her seat in a box, which was protected from the still floating currents by a thick, insulating con-

crete block. Nevertheless it was a still frightening storm of power. She had been more than lucky, that the *chain* Mabuse had welded to her *bracelts* was molten during the process without transmitting the lethal current into her body. Maybe also the *Adamant* had absorbed something.

Selina did neither feel sorry for Mabuse nor did she care about him. The notorious super-villain had intended and almost managed to kill her. Only his greed had paved the way to her to survival.

After a while she realized, that a considerable amount of those energies had indeed reached 'her' *bracelets*, but not harmed them. They had not even heated up during the process, which might have been a disaster on it's own. Instead they sparkled now like pure, highly polished silver without the slightest scratch.

"Great work, Selina," she thought, "if this bastard had at least cut this damned *chain*, they would go through as expensive jewelry, now. But they are still *handcuffs*. All of my money has been burned to ashes, and who on earth hires a girl in silver *handcuffs* without asking questions?"

She gave the cursed *chain* another desperate tug, a useless habit she had acquired over the last few days. A disaffected and still *fettered* Catwoman left the damaged building in total darkness facing an uncertain future, while a huge blackout had darkened most of Gotham City.

What remained of Mabuse's cyborg body was soon discovered by alerted policeman. His brain had survived, but the super villain could not or did not want to

make any statement. The remains of his body were transferred to a secure place. Scientists had to find out, if his brain was still working and could be rescued.

No trace or hint to the Cat was found and so the investigation concluded, that the Super Villain himself had tapped the transmission for unknown reasons and fallen victim to powers, he could not control. A workforce of a hundred man spent a whole day under pressure to repair the damage to the main transmission line.



Catwoman recovered surprisingly fast. But the cursed *manacles* still adorned her wrist and their ubiquitous control of her movements were a constant reminder about her defeat and a persistent instigation to do something against them.

On the next day after sunset Selina was once again sneaking through the streets of Gotham, wearing her cat-boots and the pants of her famous catsuit under an also black poncho, which had involuntarily become her favorite garment.

She was in a bad mood, as always after spending fruitlessly more than an hour in order to get rid of 'her' nasty '*bracelets*'. The poncho at least hid the latter from public view, but it did not spare her the disgrace to reveal them occasionally.

Opening a door, pushing a button in an elevator, to handle a computer terminal, touching her face and even bare necessities like eating or drinking required to raise her hands and give anyone, who

was accidentally looking in her direction, a clear view on the dangling *chain*, which joined the irremovable *metal circlets*.

Since the unpleasant encounter with Mabuse much to her chagrin the latter sparkled like polished silver, catching anyone's eye, when hit by the slightest shaft of light. She had tried to paint them black, but no kind of paint seemed to stick to the perfectly smooth surface.

Almost constantly she squeezed her brain about finding a way to get rid of them, but, how often she turned the problem around in her head, only two persons seemed to be able to release her from her current predicament – Supergirl, who held the key, and the legendary creator of the tough hardware, she had been condemned to wear, Hephaistus the ancient Greek God of the blacksmiths.

To ask or even beg Supergirl, was out of question – this would violate her pride and self-respect, not counting the fact, that Supergirl would probably not be willing to help her, and threatening a Kryptonian was hardly a promising approach.

Among insiders or boneheads(?) there had always been rumors, that the ancient Greek Gods were not mythological figures, but real and still alive somewhere.

But since she had acquired and investigated the *Bracelets* of Aphrodite, Selina did not rule out this possibility anymore, and the few facts, she knew about the Amazons of Paradise Island, seemed to indicate, that at least some of them were not only still alive, but still seemed to show up there on rare occasions.

Selina knew, this was a vague hope, but she was also aware, that without hope, all which remained, was despair. There was not much a *handcuffed* woman could do, even if she managed to explain, why she was *handcuffed* and why these special *handcuffs* could not be removed.

There was a scientist, a physicist named Dr. Hammersmith, once claimed to be a genius, but by now outcast by the scientific community, who claimed to have constructed a gate to an interdimensional place named Olympus and who was about to raise money for an expedition to it. For a hundred grands he was offering a place on this expedition.

Selina had checked it, before she contacted Mabuse, which seemed to be the more promising solution. There was no insurance, that this man was not a crackpot like thousands of others on the world wide net. However, the proof, that the place, this man claimed to have found a bridge to, once existed, adored her wrists, and it was better to die in action than to die as an old woman, who would have spent half of her wasted life in *handcuffs*.

The precondition to get a ticket for the expedition was to raise some money, and this was, what she was up to now. In principal the Penguin and some other members of Gotham's honorable society owed her something. This was difficult to list and even more difficult to collect.

After arranging an appointment she climbed unseen down into Gotham's underground, where the Penguin was the undisputed king. It did not take long, un-

til she reached the first checkpoint. She would have been noticed much earlier, if – well, if she were not the Cat. She appeared suddenly and without the slightest warning right in front of Dagger-Bill, who was on duty to guard his boss.

“Who’re you?” Was all he could stammer, when the red light of the laser targeting device wandered above his body.

“It’s me, the Cat,” she said, “I’ve an appointment with your boss.” He relaxed.

“Put the gun down,” he said, trying to gain the upper hand, “I’ve to search you.”

“No way,” she replied, “you’ll show me the way, and, if you behave well, I’ll abstain from punishing you for your laziness. Come on, move!” Grudgingly he raised himself. The Cat was well known here and, although the Penguin would not be enthusiastic about his performance, he would accept, that it had been no one less than the Cat, who had fooled him.

Selina needed almost no light and managed to stay in the dark. So he did not see, that the hand holding the gun was connected to its counterpart. He tried to mislead her twice, but the Cat smelled the traps and outmanœvered him.

After half an hour Dagger Bill entered the current residence of Gotham’s underworld’s uncrowned King with Selina’s gunt aiming at him. She put it into its holster, before she greeted the Penguin.

“You made it sound very urgent,” he said. “Yet you remained very vague.”

“I’ve to talk to you,” she replied, “ALONE!” He waved Dagger-Bill away.

“You’ve been beating around the bush

on the phone, Cat” he said calmly, after Dagger Bill had left. “So tell me what you really want, now, and I’ll think about it.”

“I need money,” she said, “not too much and not for free, I’ll pay it back.”

“How much?” He asked directly.

“A hundred grands,” she replied and added, “I am good for it.” He whistled.

“Right now, that’s a lot of money,” he said hesitantly, “as you might know, I’ve faced some hard drawbacks recently.”

“I didn’t charge you for taking those super bitches out of action,” she argued.

“And you were not very successful with it either,” he replied, “although Supergirl was reportedly a little bit hampered, these two interfered quite efficiently with our recent operation.”

“But this was not my fault,” she stated.

“No, but together with some other not successful enterprises the current situation forces me to save my money,” he said. “You’re the most capable burglar in town. To raise a lousy hundred grands has never been a big deal for the Cat.”

“I can’t do it now,” she said honestly.

“Why not?” She lifted the poncho, the silver *chain* dangling between her wrists.

“Because of those,” she replied, “I can’t take them off.” His eyes widened.

“Those are the ones you used to take Supergirl out of action?” He mused, and she nodded. “And in tit-for-tat response she has fitted you with them, too.”

“That’s more or less correct,” she conceded, “if I could face her in fair fight...”

“A fight with a Kryptonian’s never fair,” he stated, “only a fool fights a

Kryptonian by hands. However, I'm sure, you've tried everything already to get rid of 'your jewelry'. Mabuse's 'accident'...?"

"He wanted to betray me," she said.

"Whatever," he replied, "he's underestimated you, but obviously it didn't work out for you as well." She shook her head.

"Look, Cat," he said, "we've made business and seen better times together. Therefore I won't take advantage of your misery, but I also won't help you. This is your personal problem not mine. Besides, why don't you ask the Dark Knight?"

"Because he's my enemy as well as yours," she said, "he would put me into prison immediately, and I am not in the best condition to escape right now." She raised her joined hands for emphasis.

"Maybe...," he replied sceptically, giving her a dubious stare, "maybe not. Rumors say, you know who he REALLY is."

"These rumors are wrong," she said, but avoided his eyes, when she said so. "I don't know more about him than you."

"But there's a reliable source, who claims, that you've at least once dropped a gun, when you ought to have hit him."

"That's true, indeed" she admitted, "I may be a thief, but that doesn't mean, I shoot a man in his back." She paused for a moment and, when he remained quiet, she added: "That's against my pride."

"But Batman is our arch-enemy," he said, "he fights his own self-declared war against us, and a soldier, who doesn't do, what he or she's supposed to do, is not worth to be trusted very far for me."

"I'm neither a soldier nor in your

army," she replied truly. "I've never worked for you, we're not blood brothers, just business partners, no more no less."

"That's right, Cat," he said, "and therefore you won't get this money from me. It would be a foolish investment."

"Your last word?" She asked with bitterness, knowing his answer in advance.

"Yes!" With this single word her hope to find a trace of Hephaistus had faded away prematurely. The *chain* connecting 'her' silver *bracelets* was taugth. Without a further word she turned on her heels and disappeared in the labyrinth, which constituted Gotham's underground.



Three days later a tall man in a Sherlock Holmes outfit stood lost at the bar of Gotham city hall's annual social welfare ball, the entrance to which cost a little fortune. This was traditionally a fancy dress party, so he did not catch much attention. Nevertheless he looked a little bit lost, when a beautiful brown haired woman in a white summer dress wearing a straw head approached him from behind.

"Ah, Mr. Holmes," she said, "I am glad you could make it. I'm Irene Adler." He looked at the newcomer. Her dress was shoulder-free but still conservative and might have gone through as a business outfit. Indeed Selina, and it was her, had chosen a dress, she had occasionally worn in office, when she had been working for Markham Inc. He stared at 'her' silver *bracelets* or rather the *chain* between them.

“I’ll wear a matching pair of silver bracelets,” she had told him on the phone. When he remarked, that this was not very uncommon, she had replied, “yes, but mine will be joined by a *chain*. I think, that’ll make them unique. Adler – Holmes, you know the story?” He didn’t, so she had provided the background.

“Let’s go to a more private place, Miss Adler,” he said and, when they went to a free table, he said, “I assume your name’s not Adler, although you’ve managed to be listed in our customer files as such.”

“As well as your real name’s presumably not Sherlock Holmes,” she replied.

“Miss Adler, normally we don’t care, who orders our products, as long as he pays in advance, but you’ve ordered and received something, from which only very few persons know, that it exists.”

“And I’ve paid for it,” she replied. “That must be sufficient.” A waitress appeared and they ordered a glass of wine.

“Miss Adler, you’ve received these items only, because the Penguin told Mr. Luthor, that you’re credible without limits,” he replied after the waitress had disappeared. She raised her joined hands bent outward, so that the silver *circlets* slid slightly downwards and the short *chain* between them dangled freely, revealing, that their fit on her wrists was quite snug and did not allow her to slip them off.

“Mr. Holmes, I’ve made good use of it,” she said. “Your boss and I are on the same side. This has to be sufficient.”

“What you offered is very vague, access to a technology eventually superior to

the one of the Kryptonians, but only, if an according to our opinion very ill-fated enterprise succeeds. Mr. Luthor doesn’t believe in inter dimensional travel. He’s invested too much money into projects like this, which delivered nothing.”

“Then, why are we talking at all?”

“Well, it’s also rumored, that you are very well connected in Gotham, Miss Adler. Mr. Luthor thought, you could eventually provide some information worth the money you are trying to raise for this rather obscure project.”

“Information like what, Mr. Holmes?”

“The secret identities of one or more of Gotham’s caped heroes, like Batman, Batgirl or Supergirl for example.”

“If I would know any of these, I could raise much more money,” she replied, “there are many gentleman in Gotham, who are much more eager than your boss to know that. Unfortunately they don’t have any vision concerning technological possibilities to reach their goals.”

“Sorry, Miss Adler,” he said, “my boss isn’t interested either, provided you don’t come up with anything, you’ve to sell?”

“No I’ve not,” Selina replied firmly.

“Then you’re waisting my time. Good-bye, Miss Adler.” He placed a note on the table and left. Angrily Selina tugged on the *chain* joining ‘her’ *bracelets*.

○●○

She wanted to leave, too, when a man in one of the more common Batman outfits approached her. These outfits were

popular in Gotham. It was not the original one, but a cheap replica sold around the corner. Although the wrapping might have been cheap, its content priceless.

“Ah, Miss Kyle,” the man said in a low voice, which sent a shiver down her spine. “What a coincidence to meet you here. I just talked to Mr. Markham about you.”

“Mr. Wayne?” It was no question, she remembered this voice, as if she had heard it just yesterday. “You’re dressed as Batman. What will the ‘original’ say?”

“He will forgive me the hybris,” he replied dryly. “Mr. Markham said, you quitted your job and he didn’t know why.”

“Personal reasons, Mr. Wayne – a private reason,” she replied evasively.

“If you need some help...,” he began.

“Thanks for the offer, but I’m fine.”

“Forgive me my lack of knowledge,” he changed the topic, “but may I ask, what rôle you’ve chosen for this evening?”

“Irene Adler,” she said, “You know, Sherlock Holmes – Irene Adler, a ‘Scandal in Bohemia’.” He nodded understanding.

“The woman, who fooled Sherlock Holmes,” he replied with a warm smile. “I can imagine you very well in the rôle.”

“Unfortunately Mr. Holmes left already,” she said, “and he took the keys for those with him.” Her deft fingers, that had opened almost every safe in Gotham City at least once, as no one knew better than Batman, toyed with the connecting *chain* of the sparkling *metal circlets*, which enclosed her wrists so snugly. “You incidentally don’t have a key, that fits those?”

“I think, you’re more versatile with

locks than me,” he replied truthfully, “compared to you I’m a fumble finger. I would only scratch this exquisitely polished silver, and this would be a shame.”

“Actually it’s not so easy to open them, but that was surely intended.” She looked into the eyes behind the mask, while she said so, if there was a reaction to this remark. Either he really did not know, or he was an extraordinarily good actor.

“Maybe for an ordinary person,” he replied casually, “but surely not for you, Miss Kyle.” He gave her a look, she could not interpret and asked a question she had not expected. “Would you give me the honor to dance with the most beautiful woman in the whole city, who’s incidentally also the smartest girl I know?”

She was taken by surprise this and hesitated for a second, which he used to add, “we haven’t met for quite a while and I REALLY miss our occasional ‘rendezvous’.” She wanted to reject the offer, but a look in his eyes and the pleading tone of his voice changed her opinion.

“Why not, Mr. Wayne, but you must not think you can fool me with complements. I’m only a little secretary, who doesn’t really belong to all these wealthy and famous people.” Actually she wanted to say more, but missed the right words.

“We BOTH know, that the value of a person cannot and ought not to be measured by the figures of his or her bank account, Miss Kyle,” he replied seriously.

“That’s a rare opinion in your circles,” she replied, and he led her to the dance floor. It was a slow dance. He held her

more closely than appropriate for a loose acquaintance, and she let him do so.

“You should have come as Catwoman,” he whispered into her ear, “we would’ve made it as the couple of the evening, the Bat and the Cat, you know.”

“With me in *handcuffs*, MR. WAYNE...”

“Why not,” he replied, “everyone can see, that it’s a kind of jewelry you’re wearing. And the Cat has some affinity to jewelry, hasn’t she?” Did Batgirl really not tell him? “Besides, ‘of all God’s creatures, there’s only one, that cannot be made the slave of the lash – that one’s the cat.’”

“Is this a perception of yours or the opinion of a certain Samual Longhorn Clemens, better known as Mark Twain?”

“Miss Kyle, you always manage to surprise me,” he replied with a smile.

“Because I’ve read a book? Mr. Wayne, you’re easy to impress. If I would have chosen come as the Cat, I would hardly wear those. The Cat likes to roam freely, the Cat would never allow herself to be fitted with those. Forgive, me, that I defend a criminal, but I’ve always been a fan of the Cat, she’s so... independent.”

“What surprised me, was, that our taste in literature seems not to be so much different,” he replied seriously, “but in one point we seem to disagree fundamentally: Everyone needs someone to count on, sometimes. Even the Cat...”

“No, not the Cat,” she insisted. The music ceased, and he had to let her go. “It’s a matter of principle. It has been very nice from you to dance with me, but now it’s time to say goodbye.” She indicated, she wanted to leave, but he held her back.

“Miss Kyle, if you’ve a problem, you may tell me. I still owe you something.”

“No, Mr. Wayne, you don’t owe me anything. The scholarship, which allowed a poor orphan to enjoy a first-class university education, was funded by the Wayne Foundation. It’s me, who’s indebted to you, and I think you should know that.”

“I didn’t until now,” he replied, “the Wayne Foundation was established by my parents, and they made it a principle, that a committee of the best professors in this country elects the scholars without any involvement or even insight by the family. This is fine. I’ve never questioned it.”

“Nevertheless it was your money, which allowed me to become, what I am.”

“I disagree,” he objected. “It was entirely your diligence and your talent, that opened you those doors. I insist, that I’ve nothing to do with it – again, if there’s something, I could do for you now...”

“I’m fine, Mr. Wayne,” she rejected his offer again, “I’m sorry, but I REALLY have to leave now.” Those were her last words. He wondered about her choice of jewelry, but the thought, that it had not been a voluntary one, seemed too absurd.

Selina was desperate. She ran out of possibilities and even worse also out of ideas how to do something against ‘her’ *bracelets*, and she ran out of money either.

Secretly she had longed to tell him, what had happened, to beg him for help, even if he should have been aware, what Supergirl and Batgirl had done to her. But she did not. The Cat still had her pride.

Chapter 9

Kitty-Cat's Hiding Place

Since Bruce Wayne had not bothered to tell them, Barbara and Kara were unaware of this meeting. For them Catwoman had disappeared once again without a trace, like a black cat in the night. Nobody could tell anyone of her whereabouts. Barbara, who was professionally involved in other cases, had experienced this more than once in connection with the Cat and accepted it, but Kara found, that she had to satisfy her own ambition.

With her superior senses and technological means, she spent a lot of time in order to track down the mysterious feline. Nevertheless it took more than three month, before she appeared in Barbara's flat and came up with a partial result of her laborious investigations.

"Good news," she announced. "I may finally have found a trace of Kitty-Cat."

"So where does she hole up?" Barbara, who had the early shift, was not very enthusiastic. She had failed too often.

"Well, actually it is has not been confirmed yet." Barbara was not very sur-

prised. Almost nothing concerning the Cat had been confirmed in the past.

"Nevertheless, is she still wearing your *bracelets* or not?" She asked in order to add, "it might be interesting to watch, how she deals with her newly acquired 'jewelry'."

"To put this straight: Those are not MY, but 'Aphrodite's *Bracelets*,'" Kara replied, "and the answer is 'yes': I have very good reasons to assume, that she also did not manage to get rid of them also."

"That would mean, that Kitty-Cat's claws are still cropped," Barbara stated, "which is consistent with the fact, that no truly spectacular burglaries have occurred over the last weeks. But how do you know this, if you haven't seen here?"

"Well there is a location in lower harbor-city, named the 'Bondage Club'. You've heard about it?" Barbara nodded.

"Yes, I have even been there once," she admitted a little bit ashamed, but truthfully, "with Jim – a view years ago."

"Well, for two month, they have a new waitress there, named 'Kitty'," Kara

said, "and the waitresses in this bar..."

"... serve in *handcuffs*, I know" Barbara continued, "the perfect working place for a woman, who can't take her *handcuffs* off."

"Well, this was my conclusion, Babs."

"If that's all you have, it's a VERY weak evidence," Barbara was still skeptical. "Every bar in town has a bar maid named Kitty, and honestly I don't believe, that our Kitty-Cat works as a waitress, serving her guests in bondage – what a descent. Do you really think it's her?"

"Honestly, I still don't know," Kara replied, "but her description and the time she's started to work there fit. She should work there regularly and we won't know it for sure, if we don't convince ourselves."

"Okay, Sherlock," Barbara mocked her, "if you're so eager to know this, why're we still sitting here? Let's see and arrest her. We've still her genetic fingerprint from the attempted burglary."

"I think, we'll find her there, Babs," Kara stated, "but I don't want to arrest her," Barbara shook her head vehemently in order to express strong disagreement.

"Why not?" She asked, "I mean, if she's still cropped and stays so, that's okay with me, too, but it wouldn't also do any harm to know, that she serves her time in solitary in a nice high-security jail cell."

"No, this case calls for my personal attention," Kara said, "I believe by now, as you do, that she's dared to attacked me and therefore I'll teach her personally, what's right and wrong and, if she doesn't obey my rules, she'll wish she were in jail."

"That doesn't sound like the Kara,

I know," Barbara replied, "the one who said, that the laws apply to everyone and that they've to be followed literally."

"Oh, it's still me, Babs," the Kryptonian explained, "but since she's attacked me, it's my law, which applies here, respectively the law of my home world. You can be sure, that Kitty-Cat will not commit any crime anymore, once I'm finished with her, if that really is, what you want."

"Sounds not interestingly," Barbara replied half-pleased. Knowing her fellow heroine's fondness for secretiveness she added, "however, I guess, that you don't want to tell me any intimate details?"

"No, but if you want to watch and learn, you may accompany me," Kara replied with a smile, "you have been in that bar, so you know the constraints..."

"Only groups with one dominant are allowed, and all subs must be in bondage."

"You've been the sub?" Kara asked.

"Yeah," Barbara said, "but, it doesn't mean, I'll do it again, let's throw a coin."

"I found this trace, and it was you, who let Kitty-Cat slide," Kara reminded her. "I think, this gives me the lead."

"Okay," Barbara gave in, "but I hope you agree, that we can't show up as Supergirl and Batgirl there. We'll have to dress ourselves, so that no one'll recognize us."

"Of course! It's indeed advisable for us. Therefore I count on your funds."

"So, what's your operation schedule?"

"Well," Kara began, "I thought, we should convince ourselves today or, if it's not okay with you, as soon as possible, before our lovely bird will have flown out."

“As I told you already, today is okay. But let’s have a meal first. Humans must eat, you know.” So Barbara prepared a small meal, which they ate quietly, before they went through her funds together. Basically they chose leather outfits with head masks, which obscured their faces even to a close observer. Barbara’s dress was not more revealing than Kara’s, but endowed with a leather collar and a leash.

“These leather *cuffs* will do,” Barbara suggested for her required bondage. “I can connect them by a snap hook.”

“They are fine,” Kara gave back, “but I think, they should go to your ankles.”

“Hey, I’m wearing high heels,” Barbara replied. “There’s no reason to *hobble* me.”

“But they give you the proper touch,” Kara said and buckled them with super-speed around her ankles. Barbara noted, that she also locked the buckles by small padlocks from her collection, whose keys the keen Kryptonian pocketed as well.

“And those padlocks are simply for authenticity?” She asked sarcastically.

“Right, and I guess this *chain* fits in between?” Kara had also found a *chain* of about 16” with another pair of keyed padlocks attached in Barbara’s toy box.

“Do what you have to do, but I have only one pair of leather *cuffs*.” She could not stop Kara anyway. Soon the *chain* dangled between her ankles. The Kryptonian pocketed the corresponding keys, too.

“But you’re well equipped with all kinds of *handcuffs*?” It was no question.

“No way! You can bind my hands with rope,” Barbara conceded. “That’s suffi-

cient, so that we’ll be allowed to enter.”

“The rules have changed, they require stricter security,” her friend objected.

“Listen, Kara, I am a police officer and I won’t wear any police issue *handcuffs*. That’s against my pride,” she stated.

“I feared, you’d say so. So I bought my own set,” Kara replied and produced a pair of genuine *hinged handcuffs* from her own purse. Before Barbara could object, she switched to super-speed again and, before her fellow heroine had a chance to move, she wore them behind her back.

“Great, really great, Kara, how should I assist you if I am *fettered* like this?” Barbara’s mood had dropped rapidly.

“This is no fighting mission, we just want to convince ourselves, if it’s really Kitty-Cat, who works in this bar.”

“And you want to have some fun with me.” She looked at ‘her’ *cuffs*, “OH NO...”

“Is something wrong, Babs?” Kara asked suspiciously innocently, “I hope I’ve set the so-called double locks correctly.”

“And you have sealed the key holes with your heat vision. They cannot be opened anymore and have to be cut off!”

“It was Batman, who inspired me to do this,” Kara explained “I remembered this model ‘C’ of his *bat-cuffs* you told me about? Don’t worry I can rip them apart anytime, without hurting you.”

“But I CANNOT open them myself.”

“You mean by means of those lock-picks you’ve hidden in your belt? You didn’t intend to use those?” Barbara’s very black looks told her the contrary.

“You did it on purpose,” she accused

her fellow heroine. "This is a dirty setup."

"I don't want you to spoil this evening by freeing yourself and getting us thrown out," Kara smiled at her, but Barbara could sense a mocking twinkle in her smile – she had planned this from scratch.

"Take them off. Kara, I want those cuffs off, NOW!" She stamped her foot in anger, which made her *ankle chain* tinkle.

"No, you're well dressed for this location, and we don't have time to waste with discussions," Kara was merciless.

"Kara, I definitely won't go in public like this. Take them off," Barbara insisted.

"Kitty-Cat ought to be kept much more secure than you are for three month now. What do you think how she feels?"

"I don't care," Barbara exclaimed. "the bitch's a criminal and deserves it. I..."

"She's no more a criminal than we are. I went through the records, you provided, and read between the lines. I couldn't find a case where she stole something from someone, who didn't deserve it. I know all of her victims quite well. I really don't know, why you're chasing her so hard."

"Did you talk to Batman about her?"

"No," she said. "I've my own sources and means to gather information."

"So stealing is okay, according to your Kryptonian law, and you feel guilty for treating this poor Kitty-Cat so mean?"

"No, but almost all the things, she stole, seem to have been spent for good purposes like orphanages and hostels for homeless and so on. At least there's a certain correlation between thefts you attribute to her and noticeable donations."

"There are laws in this country, and up to now, it has been you, who always insisted, that those laws have to be obeyed literally by everyone," Barbara retorted.

"That's still my opinion," Kara said.

"So how about Kitty-Cat? She belongs behind bars for theft in sixty-seven suspected and six proven cases," Barbara declared. "Isn't it enough for a sentence?"

"She's been living with those *bracelets* for three month now. According to what she actually did, I find, that's enough."

"So you want to set a notorious burglar free?" Barbara could not believe it.

"Not immediately – this would spoil my intentions," Kara said. "But to put it straight, I also don't want to see her in prison for years with those *bracelets* on."

"And you don't want me to interfere – that's the real reason, why you put me in those," she said indicating 'her' cuffs.

"You're a clever girl," Kara replied.

"I thought we're a team," she said.

"We're, Babs, we're," Kara insured.

"But partners don't treat each other like this, they trust each other," Barbara relied and tugged angrily on her cuffs.

"You've to play the sub anyway," Kara argued practically. "It's not a big deal."

"For me it is – HMMPF." Kara had once again switched to superspeed and terminated this discussion by stuffing a ball gag into her helpless fellow heroine's mouth.

"If we thrash this out completely, Kitty-Cat will have gotten herself another job in the meantime," she put an end to their discussion. She led her fellow heroine by the leash and Barbara had

to follow her in small measured steps.



Of course Kara spared her friend the humiliation of being moved around in public in this outfit. She simply flew with Barbara in tow to the location shaded by the actually moonless darkness, which had encumbered the heaven over the city.

It was well after nine o'clock, when Kara and Barbara entered the Club. A chunky man blocked their way: "You are new here, ladies?" He asked politely.

"Yeah, we heard, that people like us can have some kinky fun here," Kara made the conversation. There was no way Barbara could take part in it. The big red rubber ball prevented reliably, that her friend could form understandable words.

"That's right, ladies, but we have certain requirements, and I have to check you first. You are the submissive?" He addressed Barbara. The latter gave Kara an angry look but nodded unwillingly.

"May I have a look at your *restraints*." Reluctantly she turned her back on him.

"All solid *steel*," Kara declared proudly, "I have the keys, but I promise she will not get free, before we leave." Nevertheless he took a closer look at Barbara's *handcuffs* and gave them a light tug. Obviously he was pleased with the result."

"Everything's fine. But *REAL wrist restraints* are sufficient," he explained, referring to the fact, that Barbara wore *leg irons* too. "It's one of our house rules, *leg restraints* are optional. So you may pass, Ladies, however there's one minor thing."

"Did we do something wrong, Sir?" Kara asked with a winning smile.

"No everything's fine. But since this is your first visit, ladies— at least that's what I think, Master Bill, that's the big man behind the bar, like's to explain the house rules to every new visitor himself in order to avoid misunderstandings. Would you be so kind and go to the bar first?"

"No problem," Kara said and grabbed Barbara's leash. The bar room was bigger than it looked from the outside. The counter filled a rectangle in its center, where a big man fulfilled the bartender's duties. This had to be "Master Bill", owner and chief barkeeper of "The Bondage Club". He wore a short leaved white shirt and a red fly. The same was true for two muscle packed coworkers.

Presumably these guy's not only served drinks but were also on the payroll in order to enforce the house rules if necessary. The bar was only moderately frequented, not bad for a genuine Tuesday, but surely well below it's capacity. Only a minority of the guest preferred bar stools. The ratio of dominants and submissives was close to one, which meant, that almost all guests had shown up as couples, almost half of which were odd ones.

Without any doubt The real attraction of this bar were the waitresses. And there she was, Selina Kyle, the Catwoman. Kara discovered her at once and gave her fellow heroine an advise.

The former cat-burglar wore black hot-pants and high heels, emphasizing her bare long and muscular legs. A leather

harness similar Barbara's framed an ample pair of bare not too big, but well-formed breasts. A black leather collar with a name tag in front, from which a leather leash dangled between her breasts, completed her outfit. The latter accessory seemed to be solely for show.

This was obviously not true for a pair of short, but genuine police-type *leg-irons* with only about a foot of *chain*, which adorned her ankles and limited her stride accordingly. The Cat was also *hobbled*.

She had of course noticed the newcomers from the corner of her eye, but even the Cat had not penetrated the masks of the two heroines, and so she did not paid much attention to them. Kara concluded, that she ought to have done this job for quite a while, because she was well adapted to her current restrictions.

Barbara and Kara observed, how Selina Kyle carried a tray with drinks to a table. She moved in short, *hobbled* steps on her four inch stiletto heels, put the tablet down on one of the small side tables installed everywhere for obviously exactly this purpose. Then she grabbed two glasses, one in each hand. She had no choice to handle them differently, because Aphrodite's graceful *Adamant Bracelets* still decorated the Cat's wrists, although the latter were no longer black as coal but sparkled like polished silver.

In order to make this task more difficult and enjoyable for the guests someone had padlocked a *steel chain* to the unbreakable *Adamant* one joining them, which was in turn connected via a sliding ring

to her *ankle chain*. Right now she kept her legs close together, which gave her a view inches more by lifting up her *hobble chain*.

A further improvement was possible by raising one leg from the ground and letting the ring of the connector *chain* slide up to the corresponding anklet. The additional slack, gained this way, did not come completely for free, because it compromised her balance. But the Cat would not have been the Cat, if she easily lost her balance, even on fairly high heels.

Selina had applied this trick frequently right from her start on the job in order to overcome the narrow limits in range. This had had given the athletic Cat a considerable advantage over all other waitresses, who applied it rarely and only if they could not avoid the unstable position. She had been able to move faster, serve more customers and gather more tips than her less gifted colleagues.

It had not taken long until the bar's owner had noticed this and decided to level the competition of his employees a little bit. So on one evening, when she was about to resume her duties, to Selina discovered her chagrin that 'her' connector *chain* had been shortened by a couple of inches. Each of these "hardware sets" had a name tag, a mix up could be excluded. It was Master Bill, who cared for the equipment, and these *chains* were all adjusted to the wearer's individual heights. Someone had done this on purpose either with Master Bill's approval or by his order.

She had not mentioned it, but since then much to the pleasure of the male

guests Selina had to raise one of her long legs in order to enjoy the same range as her colleagues. Right now she distributed drinks, with the natural cat-like grace in particular admired by male visitors and received a few tips, the guests used to stuff into the waistband of her hot-pants.

After she was finished with this task, she received a slap on her buttocks. Kara could see, that Selina's fists were clenched within the confinement of her *cuffs*. The Cat was cropped but not tamed. Nevertheless Selina managed a winning smile, fetched her purse and put the notes in it. Then she fetched the tray with her joined hands and *hobbled* back to the counter.

Half a dozen other waitresses hobbled around like Selina all in the same kind of bondage with the exception, that presumably someone was able to take their *handcuffs* off. One wore her *handcuffs* in the back. Later they should learn, that this was due to a special request of some guests. Kara took hold on Barbara's leash.

"Our Kitty-Cat seems to be still well secured, which is fine," Kara whispered into Babara's ear. "However, half of the guest are dressed like us," I don't think she'll recognize us behind these masks."

"You want to be served by her?" Babara, who was gagged, could not articulate this words properly, only muffled sounds emerged from her gag, but knowing her friend Kara sensed their meaning.

"Why not? She seems to be responsible for the six tables in the back part. Two of them are still empty.." She interrupted herself, because because "Master

Bill", the club's owner, approached them.

"Good evening, ladies. You like, what you see?" His smile was all buisiness.

"It's quite..., well, let's say interesting," Kara replied politely with a similar smile.

"I don't recognize the two of you," he said casually. "You're new to this place?"

"Yes," Kara replied. "We got a tip from a friend, this should be the hottest place in Gotham – and I think he's right."

"I'm pleased about your judgment, but before they join the fun, I'd like to introduce my guests," he began his speech. "It's not easy to run a place like this and to assure, that ALL the guests have fun. A hand full of rules have proved their value over the years, and we request our guests and employees to stick to them. Who doesn't obey this rules, will be thrown out and won't be allowed to come back. I'll tell you these rules now, ladies, and you're free to decide, if you want to stay or not."

"Okay, that's fair," Kara replied seriously, "go on, what are these rules?"

"The first rule's, no violence! Not against your companions and not against our waitresses. No one will be beaten or whipped inside this bar. As you may have seen already, our waitresses are a little bit restricted in their movements. They are advised to tolerate a playful slap on there buttocks, when they serve you drinks or a meal, but they must not be molested or touched inappropriately – or forced to do something, they don't want to do."

"That's fine with us," Kara replied.

"Ken, can you fetch Jenny from the rest room to give us an introduction?" He

addressed one of his fellow barkeepers.

"And the second rule?" Kara asked.

"No illegal activities in this bar, even if they're consensual. No drugs, no table sex, nothing, forbidden by the law."

"We appreciate this. Claire and I have never been in trouble with the law."

"Good. The third rule is: Don't drink too much. It's not, that I don't want to sell alcohol, but if you make trouble, we'll throw you out. The waitresses are advised to judge, if you have enough. If they decide, you've enough, they won't serve alcoholic drinks anymore. We expect our guests to accept this decision or to leave."

"Claire and I don't want to be molested by drunken guest either and we appreciate this rule, too," Kara replied, "Are there more rules and if, what are they?"

"Well there are and they're concerned with the treatment with our waitresses. Jenni, who's been out of service 'till now, will explain it to you." He left them in the company of a blond waitress, who was outfitted very similarly to Catwoman.

"High, I'm Jenny and I serve here as a waitress." She extended her wrists joined by a pair of *chain-linked handcuffs* connected via another *chain* to a matching pair of short-linked *leg-irons*. With professional knowledge, Barbara judged, that these *restraints* were genuine police-issue.

"Nice to meet you, Jenny," Kara said, and Barbara nodded, which was all she could do. "I assume, Jenni is not your real name?" The waitress shook her head.

"No, the names on our name tags are fictional. It's a precaution by Master Bill

in order to protect us. We must not tell any guest the real ones," she explained.

"Okay, Jenny, you and the other waitresses are into bondage?" Kara asked.

"It looks that way," she replied, raising her *leg-iron chain* by lifting her *handcuffed* hands, "but actually, I'm not, and I think the other waitresses are neither, except for Kitty. Well, at least I think so."

"Who's Kitty?" Kara asked casually.

"The brown-haired girl over there," Jenny replied referring to Selina Kyle.

"And why do you actually work here?"

"Because it's well paid. We earn twice as much as a regular bar maid in Gotham. I'm an archæology student, and I earn my college money during the evenings here."

"Isn't it hard to serve the guest that way?" Kara asked an obvious question.

"Not at all, it takes some time to do something if you are restrained like this. But the guest like, what they see, and they wait patiently, 'till we have fulfilled our duties. If your hands are fixed in front like this," she raised hers to their limit, "you can do almost everything you are used to do, just a little bit slower and clumsier."

"But the waitress over there has her hands fixed in the back," Kara remarked.

"That's Barby," Jenni replied deliberately. "She's accepted a special request."

"What's that?" Kara asked nosily.

"Well, if the bar isn't overcrowded, Master Bill allows, that a pair of guests reserve one of us waitresses as personal attendant. Provided the girl agrees, it costs a hundred bucks, which are for the girl, because she cannot gather any other tips

over the time. Then she might be fitted with additional *restraints* or fixed to the table by these leashes, we're wearing. Do you want to make a request for me?"

"I don't think so, maybe later. What do you do in an emergency?" Kara asked. "I mean serving in *restraints* is fine for the guests, but if e.g. a fire breaks out..."

"It's not a secret, that all of us girls have a standard key in our purses, which fits these," she indicated her *handcuffs*, "and those," she explained, jangling her *leg-irons*. "But we're not allowed to use it, except in an emergency. We're not allowed to take these off not even during our regular work breaks. If I'd remove them now, I'd be fired immediately."

"What do you do on the toilet?"

"Well, there're no cameras there." Jenni smiled. "What the boss can't see,..."

"This girl, Kitty," Kara asked almost casually, "why do you think, she's the only waitress here, who's really into bondage?"

"Because she wear's her own, private pair of *handcuffs*, different from all others. Master Bill granted her the privilege."

"Maybe she's just allergic to nickel or something similar," Kara suggested.

"I don't think so. She wears them when she arrives here and when she leaves. In fact, I think, I never saw Kitty without this pair of *handcuffs* on her wrists. This ist pretty weird, isn't it?"

"Very weird, indeed," Kara replied, "is there something else we should know?"

"Well it's custom here to put the tips into the waistbands of our hot-pants."

"Well, thank you very much, Jenni."

Kara grabbed Barbara's leash and headed straight for one of the free tables in Selina's service district. Soon the former Catwoman showed up. She did not seem to recognize the two heroines in disguise.

"Good evening, ladies. How may I serve you?" The Cat asked casually.

"Of course, Kitty," Kara pretended to have read her name-tag, "can you make a turn for us?" . This was a frequent request. Selina looked at the ceiling and did, what she was advised to do in such cases: She raised her joined arms as far as her connector *chain* allowed, which was not much, and performed a perfect pirouette.

"Extraordinarily," Kara remarked and added: "You're born to wear those *chains*. Don't you agree, Claire?" Barbara grunted and when she realized, that she could not form proper words she nodded simply.

"Do you want some drinks ladies?"

"May I take, a closer look at your *handcuffs*, Kitty?" Kara turned to Barbara. "A friend of mine's a collector, and he's a similar pair to this one, which he considers to be the crown of his collection. He had a problem with a lost key, and it was almost impossible to obtain a spare one, although he's a wealthy man. Believe it or not he obtained a collection of fifteen-thousand keys in order to obtain one, which fits. Now he's trunk full of keys in his garage. I wouldn't believe it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, Claire."

She could feel, that these words had grepped Selina's full attention as intended. Catwoman extended her wrists, which were well captured by "Aphrodite's

bracelets", for inspection pretending to be calm, but Kara sensed a light trembling.

"Look at these fine arcs, Claire," she addressed Barbara, "they follow the outline of her wrists perfectly, and yet there's no ratchet, just a tiny safety lock, which Harry claims be unpickable, all the same and Harry thought, his were unique. He claimed they were made of an indestructible *metal* and paid a fortune for them." Then she turned back to Selina.

"Thanks, Kitty. You don't have problems with the keys?" She asked sweetly.

"No, why?" Selina managed to lie and shook her head, but the lines in her pretty face told Kara, that her mind was in overburst mode. It required all of her self-control to ask the next question casually.

"What can I bring you, ladies?" Only a slight tremor in Kitty-Cat's voice revealed, that she was deeply disturbed.

"I would like a coke with rum," Klara stated, "and Claire here prefers a glass of White Bacardi, with a straw, don't you?"

"Very well, ladies." Selina turned on her heels around and *hobbled* slowly away. Kara waited, until Selina had managed half of the way to the bar in her tiny tripple steps, before she raised her voice.

"Wait a minute, Kitty." She did not say more. Selina took a deep breath turned around again and *hobbled* back.

"Kitty, your colleague over there serves with her hands behind her back, is it possible, that you do this, too?" Kara observed, that Selina clenched her fists. The *chain* joining her *handcuffs* was taut.

"She's accepted a special request for

exclusive service, Mistress," Selina explained. "We can't use a tray this way, and it takes too long to serve everyone; therefore this would cost you a hundred bucks.

"Well I can afford it." Kara replied.

"I DON'T ACCEPT special requests."

"That's a pity, because I would have preferred you. Would the blond girl over there do it?" She nodded to Jenny, who was now serving the tables next to Selina's district, in order to put Selina on the spot.

"For you I'll make an exception," Cat-woman hurried to say. She managed to say it buisness-like, but Kara could sense, that it had not been easy for the proud Cat to form these words. "But I've to ask for allowance first," she added quickly.

"Do it then." Selina turned to the man at the bar, waited until his eyes found hers, bent forward, lowered her *cuffed* hands and raised her left leg, indicating, she intended to step through 'her' *cuffs*. He nodded and advised her to do so. At the same time he advised Jenny by a gesture to overtake Selina's other tables.

Angry about this humiliation Selina put her purse to the back, where she would be able to reach it. She managed to keep her balance while she stepped through 'her' *cuffs* despite the high heels and *irons*. After this she turned her back to Kara, bowed forward and raised her hands dutifully to the limits of her connector *chain* to Kara for inspection.

"I'm at your command, Mistress." The proud, former cat-burglar almost bit on her tongue, when she said this.

"Very niece, dear, very niece," Kara

purred, than she slept her on the buttocks. She noted, that Selina reacted with an angry tug on her *wrist chain*. The cat in her was well hidden but not tamed.

“Here’s your money,” Kara slipped a hundred dollar note into the waistband of her hot-pants, directly beyond her navel, where she would hardly be able to reach it. “Now go and fetch our drinks, Kitty.”

Slowly an angry Selina Kyle *hobbled* to the bar and fetched their drinks. However, she immediately proved her cat-like limberness, when she served both drinks on one tour, without spilling a drop. The note had also disappeared from her pants.

“Thanks, Kitty. Your *handcuffs* are very nice, but your colleague serves with *binged hindcuffs*. They give her another flair, if you know, what I mean. Do you think, you can wear those too?” Kara did not have to see it, in order to know, that the unbreakable *chain* between the Cat’s *wristlets* behind her back was taught.

“You wish is my command, Mistress.” Selina *hobbled* back to the counter, surrounded it and approached Master Bill. She talked to him and bowed forward to give him easier access to her wrists.

Kara noticed, that he wanted to take hold of her elbow, but Selina stepped back. She said something to him. He shrugged and she approached him again. He clicked a pair of *binged handcuffs* on her wrists above her own *wrist cuffs*. She wanted to leave, but he held her back and engaged the double locks. Five minutes later she was back with an additional pair of heavy *binged handcuffs* on her wrists.

“Master Bill, said, ‘make assurance double sure’,” she explained the ensemble with a shrug, but Kara was merciless.

“This still doesn’t look right, Kitty. You have a key to those in your purse?”

“Yes, but...” Selina wanted to object.

“Give it to me, you can’t stay like this. I’ve to make an adjustment,” Kara insisted. “They don’t suit you this way.” Reluctantly Selina handled her the key.

“You look very flexible, Kitty,” she said maliciously, “I am sure you can make your elbows touch.” Kara was merciless.

“Yes, but...,” the former Catwoman began, but Kara interrupted her again.

“You look like a reputable girl to me, Kitty, aren’t you?” she said, “I’m sure you want to earn those hundred bucks.”

“Of course,... Mistress,” Selina pressed the answer through her teeth.

“Turn around, Kitty, it’s for your own good.” When Selina complied, Kara opened the *binged cuffs* and reapplied them above her elbows. Catwoman’s legendary flexibility allowed her easily to touch her elbows, and the fixation caused her well shaped breast to stuck out prominently. She double-locked them.

“You look magnificent, Kitty. What do you think, Claire?” Barbara could only nod, since her ring-gag prohibited her to form proper words, while Selina explored her remaining degrees of freedom. She was not very pleased with the result.

“Would you mind, if I clip your leash to the ring over there,” Kara asked. It was not difficult to conclude, that the leashes were not completely dis-functional.

"Of course not, Mistress, this belongs to the service," Selina replied dutifully, slipped onto an upholstered stool next to their table and allowed Kara to affix her leash. The *chain* joining the *steel anklets* on her well shaped legs dangled freely.

"Spread you legs, a little bit, Kitty, this is no finishing school." Selina gave her a black look, but did what Kara requested. The *chain* between 'her' *anklets* and the one joining 'her' *bracelets* jangled, while the Cat assumed a straight posture.

"You've very fine breasts, Kitty. Are they real?" To Kara's surprise she blushed.

"Yes," Selina replied scarcely audible.

"What about a nipple *chain* for these nice boobs?" Kara asked provokingly.

"No, Mistress," the reply was firm. "That's where I draw the line. No one touches my breasts." Kara decided not to carry her humiliation over the edge.

"Very well, Kitty. They are nice as they are. I talked to your colleague Jenny, when we arrived, and she told me, that you are a real bondage enthusiast, Kitty, furnishing your own *handcuffs*, I appreciate this," Kara mocked the cropped Cat.

"You mean those on my wrists. They are a gift of an old friend, I wear them for sentimental reasons," She repeated the cover story she had come up with in order to explain, why she was not seen without her "jewelry", unaware of Kara's identity.

"Actually you move very well in *handcuffs* AND *leg-irons*. That's not easy to find. Would you like to work for me as a housemaid?" Kara asked. "I think, I'd pay you the same you earn here on average, the

cuffs are mandatory, but those *irons* would be reserved for special opportunities."

"I'm comfortable with my job here, Mistress," Selina replied cautiously, "and those *anklets* and *irons* don't bother me."

"You are really into bondage aren't you?" Kara pushed further. "Jenny also told me, that you never take those *handcuffs* off. They've to mean a lot to you."

"The friend, I received them from, meant a lot to me." Selina stuck to her story. "He's dead. I wear them, because he liked this way. They're comfortable."

"And they suit you extraordinarily," Kara commented. Selina's fists were clenched within their confinement.

"Thanks, Mistress," she said. "However, I heard coincidentally, that you know a collector, who paid a fortune for this kind of *cuffs*. How much is a fortune?"

"Oh, old Harry paid fifty thousand bucks for them," Kara lured her. "Fifty thousand bucks for a pair of *handcuffs*. You've a treasure on your wrists, Kitty."

"Wow." She feigned excitement. "For this much, I'd sell them. Who's this guy?"

"Harry's a collector, Kitty," Kara replied bitter-sweetly, "and he's already a pair. I don't think anyone else will pay so much money for them. I'd tax them three hundred bucks, keys included. You're not going to sell them for three hundred?"

"No they are much more worth to me, Mistress," Selina replied. "However, who's this guy, who paid so much for those *handcuffs*. Does he live in Gotham?"

"He lives in Gotham, at least he owns an estate here, where he keeps his collec-

tion. But you can put the idea right of your mind, Kitty. Harry does not like everyone to know, that he collects *handcuffs*, and I won't tell you, where he lives."

"But Mistress, for a poor waitress this is a lot of money, even if he pays half as much, it's a lot of money," Selina begged.

"I'll think about it, but first fetch another coke for me and a bloody merry for my slave, you like a bloody merry, Claire?" Barbara shook her head. "A coke then?" She nodded. "That means two cokes for us." She unclasped Selina's leash.

"As you wish, Mistress." She scooted down from the stool. Although her arms were fixed rigidly by the two pairs of *cuffs*, this was a smooth and elegant move.

"And Kitty, get yourself a coke too, if you like one," Kara offered generously.

"Thank you, but we're not allowed to drink with the guests, Mistress. Besides, it would be a little bit difficult to hold a glass with all this jewelry you put on me." The latter was undeniably true. She *hobbled* to the bar, fetched the requested drinks and served them again without spilling a drop. Then she opened her purse and took the *handcuff* key out.

"Come, Kitty, take your seat," Kara requested ignoring the pleading gesture.

"I'd like to obey, Mistress," Selina replied. "But I would be REALLY glad, if you grant me to use the toilet first." She said and reached Kara the *handcuff* key.

"Of course, Kitty, take your time," Kara took the key and bent down, as if she wanted to release Selina's *leg-irons*.

"No," Selina stepped back, annoyed

this lack of understanding. "We aren't allowed to remove those. Couldn't you just take these from my elbows, Mistress?"

"Oh those, of course, Kitty." Kara fumbled a little bit with the locks pretending to be a fumble finger, while Selina was impatient, but finally they came off.

"Thanks, Mistress." Quickly Selina stepped through the *chain* of her *handcuffs*.

"I will be back soon," she announced and tripled to the door signed WC as fast, as those high heels and the *chain* limiting her stride allowed. Immediately Barbara gestured to Kara to release her gag.

"Do you think, she recognized us?" Kara asked, unbuckling her ring gag.

"No, but what to hell do want to do?" Barbara grimaced with pain. "It's her. So let's wait 'till closing time and take her to the police HQ or do with her, whatever you want. Properly *cuffed* as she's now, even the Cat can't give us much trouble."

"I don't want to take her to prison. She's had a hart time to come to term with those *cuffs* for three month by now. That's almost enough punishment."

"She's the Cat," Barbara argued, "the one, who brought you and Diana into prison, who tricked you into those *cuffs* even you couldn't remove and the one, who's battled Batman and me for years."

"That's the point, Babs. Kitty-Cat's not really a bad girl, at least not one of the really bad ones. But she's a worthy opponent for both of us, but only if she can roam freely. Hampered by those *Adamant cuffs*, she can't do much more than to work here as a waitress. That's a waste."

"So you actually want to set her free?"

"Yes!" Kara replied earnestly, "but not right now and not unconditionally. Could you ask Batman, if we can use his Mansion next to the cape," she asked, "the one, he rarely uses, or at least its garage?"

"I think, that's no problem. You want her to try to steal this fictitious box with the *handcuff* keys?" Barbara concluded.

"If she is desperate enough to try this, she has suffered enough," Kara asserted firmly and added: "She'll think about it and learn from it – she's not stupid."

"No, but I don't agree, that it's a good idea to free Kitty-Cat from her *cuffs*," Barbara objected. "If you don't want to put her into prison, we can simply leave and forget, that we found her," she argued. "After all she's found a job, which goes along very well with her natural talents. So, why should we interfere at all?"

"You are mean... There she comes. Time for you to shut up." Kara forced the gag back into Barbara's mouth and buckled it, while Selina *hobbled* back to their table. She observed, that her stride was perfectly adjusted to the length of *chain* between her *anklets*, which allowed her to carry her charges without the need to use her joined hands to keep balance. Despite the restrictions imposed on her movements the Cat was in an admirable shape.

When Selina arrived, she stepped through the *chain* between 'her' *handcuffs*, turned her back to Kara with her elbows almost touching and announced dutifully, "I'm back to your disposal, ladies."

"Very well, Kitty," Kara said, "let's im-

prove your posture." She locked the discarded *cuffs* back onto Selina's elbows.

Catwoman chuckled a little bit and tested her new bonds habitually before she replied, "Thank you, Mistress. May I bring you or Lady Claire something?"

"SLAVE CLAIRE, Kitty. Claire's my slave," Kara answered, which got her a black look from Barbara. "No Kitty, take your seat and let me fix you to the table." Selina knelt on the stool, her knees spread. She bowed into Kara's direction to allow her to fasten her leash to the ring.

"Kitty, Claire and I just talked about you and your *handcuff* fetish. Claire had a good idea, where you could live it out better paid and more easily than here."

"I'm happy here, Mistress," Selina gave back. "I don't have to do, what I don't want, and I can wear those *cuffs* halve the day without having to answer any questions. Anyone here expects me to wear them and halve a day's enough."

"Well it concerns old Harry, the collector, I told you about, but if you are not interested..." Kara ejected her fishing rod.

"A *handcuff* collector, that's something different of course," Selina made a verbal U-turn. "Do you think, I may get a look at his collection?" Almost uncsciously the Cat toyed with the only piece of her *restraints*, she was really concerned about, the short *chain*, which joined 'her' *bracelets*.

"That's not all. You definitely'll get the opportunity to wear all kind of *handcuffs*, you can imagine, and your paycheck will be much bigger than here." This proposal was everything else than appealing,

but the Cat was blindsided by the hope to obtain the missing key to her freedom.

“What do I have to do in order to earn such a paycheck?” She asked mockingly, “sleep with him and all of his guests?”

“No just doing his housework, cleaning, vacuuming, wishing and occasionally preparing a meal, *handcuffed* of course and occasionally *leg-ironed* too, but usually dressed more decently than your current outfit. But you may be required to serve drinks bare breasted sometimes. Harry’s over seventy. He had a maid for this until now, and he’s looking for a replacement.”

“Sounds interesting,” Selina replied.

“You don’t have a problem with having you elbows *cuffed* for more than an hour?” Kara asked, knowing the answer.

Indeed, Selina hurried to reply: “Not at all, Mistress. You fitted me with these ten minutes ago. If you like to stay and keep me this way, I can easily prove it.”

“Well, then you are under consideration,” Kara said generously, “I mean in case you are interested – and if you can prepare an eatable meal if requested?”

“Yes, I’m interested,” Selina confirmed, “and I can assure you, that I’m a good cook, Mistress. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mistress”

“Well, I’ve to ask Harry first. But as far as I know, he’s still looking for a replacement, and you fit the profile perfectly. Do you have any serious diseases?”

“No, honestly not, Mistress.”

“Do you object, if I take a few photos with my cellphone-cam of you wearing the *handcuffs*. I mean can you do some

posing for us, so that I can send Harry your job application?” Kare requested.

“No, this would be fine, Mistress. But please take care, that no other guests appear on those photos. It’s forbidden to photograph other guests, but the waitresses are advised to pose anytime.”

“Well then let’s take the wall as background and you as the main motive.” Kara took some photos of Selina kneeling on the stool, posing with her *cuffs*. Then she unclasped Selina’s leash and on Kara’s demands the former Catwoman did another series of truly HOT photos demonstrating her extraordinary flexibility in mockingly fighting her current *restraints*.

“So that’s enough, Kitty. Go and fetch another Coke for Claire and me. I will send Harry an email with your photo shooting, and, if he’s interested, you will hear from me or directly from him.”

“Can’t you give me his address?”

“No, Kitty,” Kara refused strictly, “only if he invites you for a job interview.”

“Very well, Mistress” Selina replied and *hobbled* away. They spent another exciting hour with Catwoman literally on the receiving end of the leash, before Kara announced, that they had to leave.

“It was a pleasure to served by you, Kitty, however I think it’s time to go, I want to pay the bill for the two of us.”

“It was a pleasure to serve you, ladies,” Selina managed to say. Swallowing the truth, she collected Kara’s money.

“Thank you, Mistress, could you please unclasp my leash from the ring and maybe also undo my elbow *cuffs*?” She

asked and handed Kara the corresponding key, she had fetched from her purse.

"Of course, Kitty," Kara replied and took the key in order to unlocked Selina's elbow *cuffs*. But before she unclasped the leash, she clasped the *hinged cuffs* back onto Selina's wrists, making sure, that their keyholes were facing upwards, so that she could not access them easily.

"HEY!" The Cat exclaimed angrily.

"Is something wrong, Kitty?"

"Excuse me, Mistress," Selina swallowed and shrugged her shoulders, "I guess rules are rules." Kara double locked the *hinged cuffs* also, before she undid the leash. She scooted down from the stool.

"Mistress?" The Cat fidgeted nervously with her doubled *wrist restraints*.

"Yes, Kitty, did I forget something?"

"Yes, Mistress," she said. "You wanted to recommend me for a new job?"

"Good point, Kitty," Kara pretended to have forgotten about it. "where can I contact you, if Harry is interested?"

"Here, every day, except on Mondays, from 8 PM to 3 AM," she provided the information voluntarily. "We arrive a earlier and leave later for changing our dresses."

"Well, you'll hear from me, if Harry is interested," Kara promised. "Come on, Claire." She grepped Barbara's leash.

"Thank you very much, Mistress." Selina stepped through both pairs of *cuffs* and realized, that Kara had applied the second pair with the key holes facing upwards, shrugged, put the key back into her purse and *hobbled* to the counter, to have them removed by Master Bill.

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The two superheroines left the bar and because of her hefty gestures Kara removed her friend's gag immediately.

"Could you remove those too? We've to talk." Barbara asked, indicating the jammed *handcuffs* behind her back.

"Not yet, Babs. Let's plan our next steps first." Despite Barbara's protests Kara carried an angry Batgirls arms like a child and they flew to her apartment.

"Kara, if you don't open these *handcuffs* NOW our friendship is on stake."

"Give me five minutes," Kara insisted.

"Okay, I hear." Barbara was impatient.

"It's about Catwoman. We know, where she spends her time from Tuesday to Sunday between 7.45 PM and 3.15 AM..." Kara began, but was interrupted.

"Yes, and that's all we need to arrest her after she leaves this bar today," Barbara erupted. "We'll take her to police HQ and leave the *cuffs* on her. She's not able to remove them, so she'll have to spend the next years with them on her wrists without a chance to escape. That's, what the law, you appraise, requires and what she deserves. You can send her the key when she's finished her term."

"No, she's not harmed anybody except the pride of you, Diana and me as superheroines" Kara argued. "She's spent three month in those *cuffs* and works as a waitress in that bondage bar, which is presumably the only job she can do without revealing, that she can't take those *bracelets* off. That have been three months of hell

for her, and that's definitely enough punishment. – You should know that.”

“I disagree,” she replied. “However, you can take these *cuffs* off me, and, if you insist, I promise to chase her no longer, but if she commits something else...”

“Not so fast, Babs. I've good reasons to release her from those *cuffs* soon. I want you to understand, why we must not leave her that way. You know she's no means to get rid of them. How'd you feel, if you'd have had to wear these *handcuffs* not for three hours but for three month, because every expert you consult fails?”

“Not very good, I guess,” Barbara admitted. “But in Catwoman's case there's another reason to be taken into account.”

“But no reason, that counts for me.”

“Nevertheless, as long as her claws will be cropped this way, she won't be able to rob someone, and it won't be easy for her to steal anything. If we do nothing about it, we'll save a lot of people to fall pray to Catwoman's crimes, simply because she'll no longer be able to commit them.”

“But you must not convict anyone for crimes he or she's not committed yet.”

“But she'll commit these crimes, that's as sure as water flows downwards.”

“Than you'll catch her. If you should need assistance, it will be a pleasure for me to assist you,” Kara dug in her heels.

“What do you really want, Kara?”

“You could provide me with a pair of those special ‘model C’ *bat-cuffs* and help me to lure her into my trap or stay out.”

“And if I don't do so?” Barbara asked.

“Then you can consult someone to

cut yourself out of your current jewelry. I could arrange, that it will not go unnoticed that this misadventure happened to Jim Gordon's fancily dressed daughter.”

“That's blackmail and betrayal of a crime-fighter comrade.” She protested.

“No it's just convincing a bullheaded buddy to do the right thing.” Barbara pouted. She did not like the idea, but Kara could be more stubborn than any human being she knew, and she had the means and power to enforce her opinion.

“Okay, I bow to the violence,” Barbara surrendered. “But let me out of those.”

“And...?” Kara was still suspicious.

“And I will follow your suggestions in these matter,” she said unwillingly and added: “You have my word as a heroine.”

“I count on that,” Kara said, gripped Barbara's wrists and broke the top quality *steel cuffs* as if they were made of wax.

“Wow, my job would be much easier if I would have your powers,” Barbara admitted. “I know you for so long now, but it's always amazing to see, how you do this. Anyway, what's your command, royal highness of superheroines?”

“She's said she will be in that bar, 'till 3.15 PM.” We have halve an hour. Let's try to track her back to her hiding place.”

“What for?” Barbara asked baffled.

“Any knowledge about your enemies can be used as a weapon, if you are smart enough to use it,” Kara smiled. “And Catwoman is still a potential foe, isn't she?”

“Clausewitz?” Barbara guessed.

“No, General Jar-El-Zorro, 23rd dynasty.” They flew back to bar and ob-

served the main and back entrance. Five other women, presumably her fellow waitresses were picked up by men with cars until 3.12 AM, there was no trace of the Cat yet. At 3.15 AM another female figure, clad into a black poncho-like garment, black trousers and shafted boots left the back entrance of the Bondage Club, which moved quickly with the distinctive grace of Catwoman. Kara and Barbara were sure, she wore the irremovable *Adamant bracelets* under that poncho.

They followed her carefully, apparently unnoticed in a distance. After four blocks a street gang consisting of three young men armed with knives blocked her way. This was no conspirational meeting, and Kara wanted to intervene.

"No, wait," Barbara stopped her friend, "Kitty-Cat, can care for herself," she claimed. "Stay here and observe!"

"But she's *handcuffed!*" Kara objected.

"She may not have your powers, but she's quick and smart. Watch and learn," Barbara insisted. Seconds later, all three of them laid on the ground unconscious and severely injured by well-timed kicks precisely aimed at their heads and groins.

"If I wouldn't have seen it, I would not believe it," Kara was truly impressed.

"I can only repeat myself," Barbara replied, "never underestimate your enemy. She may not be able to fly or snap steel, but she's still a formidable enemy."

Catwoman's hands, which were definitely connected by a short, but sparkling *chain* appeared and picked up a cell phone one of the wannabee-bandits had lost. She spoke a few words and threw the de-

vice into the drains. The former master thief's connected hands disappeared under the garment together with the arguably most valuable and yet not appreciated peace of jewelry in Gotham, and she proceeded, as if nothing had happened.

"I'll follow Kitty-Cat, because I can fly in case, it will be necessary. You call your colleagues," Kara commanded.

"Why? – Even I wouldn't arrest her for beating up three street robbers."

"No, tell them what had happened, without mentioning any names, they shall hospitalize and arrest these guys, not her," Kara clarified her directions.

"To your command." This way it was done. It turned out, that Selina had called an ambulance already, while Supergirl to her chagrin and disbelief was unsuccessful in locating Catwoman's hiding place.

"I had her in clear view, and from one second to the other she was gone. I've checked everything," a disappointed Kara told her fellow heroine afterwards.

"I told you, you are waisting your time. Kitty-Cat has her little secrets," Barbara replied wisely. "Besides, in the next days you're on your own in tracking down Kitty-Cat, I've the night shift and, while you are going to play games with her, I've to earn some money for living."

The next pursuing enterprises were uneventful insofar, as nothing extraordinarily happened, but also unsuccessful, because at some point differing from time to time, despite her X-ray vision Kara always lost track of Selina somehow.

Chapter 10

New Rules

“I’ve given up,” Kara begrudgingly and disbelievingly admitted her defeat to Barbara, “somewhere Kitty-Cat always left me behind, and it’s totally unpredictable for me, where this will happen next time.”

“I could have told you that.” Barbara was not surprised, “I don’t have your abilities, but I’ve chased Kitty-Cat for three, and I’ve never managed to track her down. The only way to do that, is to put a forged tracking collar around her throat, and this method only works as long, as she finds a way to remove it.”

“That would be a promising solution,” Kara replied seriously. “However, I don’t care, where she’s hiding anymore, let’s set our trap and catch her. When do we get the keys to Batman’s house, respectively it’s garage? Three days are sufficient.”

“He said, we can have it any time.”

“That’s fine. Have you told Batman, why we need it?” Kara asked in passing.

“He hasn’t asked, so he doesn’t need to know,” Barbara replied, “as I told you, he’s been a little bit soft on Kitty-Cat

recently. However, what’s your intention with this plot, you’ve created?” She asked back. “And do you really believe, that Kitty-Cat’s actually swallowed the lure?”

“Well, I think, she’ll be suspicious about my offer. She’s definitely not stupid, but she’s also desperate. Did you observe how she fought her *cuffs*, when someone slapped her?” Kara did not expect an answer and continued, “our Kitty-Cat’s everything else than happy with her current job, Babs. And that’s why, I think, she’ll fall victim to my trap.”

“Why is it important to provoke her to do something? If it’s your intention to set her free anyway, so that she can occupy the whole force again, why don’t you go to this bar, take that key, I’ve acquired for you and take those *cuffs* from her. That saves us three days and the result will be the same. What do we gain from this comedy you’re stage managing?”

“It’s a matter of justice, Babs,” Kara explained. “We must not commit her for something we cannot honestly blame on

her. That's a line I won't cross – and a sophisticated game like the human game of chess. Do you know what a Gambit is?"

"A special kind of chess-opening."

"Right. Here this means, that I'll offer her a potential advantage seemingly for free, namely to give her back the ability to move unnoticed in the human society, which is coincidentally also essential for her ability to commit crimes."

"But isn't that, what you and me want to achieve in the first place and – if I might remind you – you promised to support me with: To protect this city and it's citizens from the notorious Catwoman?"

"No, my intention's not to disable her – that would be very easy. But – that's the point – it's not justified. I want to teach her the Kryptonian way, that crime doesn't pay off. This requires her to learn some lessons, I'll teach her. That might take some time, but according to our experiences, this is the most efficient way to reach our aims," Kara proclaimed.

"Right now destiny means it well with us." Kara philosophized. "As we've seen in that bar as well as, when we tried to track her down together, she's not much hampered by those *bracelets*, less than a human, who lost an arm or a leg. But they deny her the ability to move unnoticed among other people. Once she's to do something, which requires to use her hands, she'll attract attention, in the best case regarded as bondage freak in the worst as a criminal, who's on the run."

"But isn't that a very satisfactory achievement? I see no reason to change

anything. You can simply throw away the key and Catwoman's career as a criminal will be more or less finished. Why should we reopen a problem, that's solved already – solved to everyone's satisfaction?"

"As I told you, we must not leave her that way forever – it's not justified."

"Why not? Some cultures still punish theft by amputating a hand, which is much more drastic than, what we did, by fitting her with those neat *bracelets*."

"No civilized culture does it neither on earth nor elsewhere and even more important: There is no existing law, that prescribes this kind of punishment. We've sworn to enforce existing laws. Sometimes it might be necessary to introduce new laws, but the essence of my talk is: A law must exist and be known, before you can enforce it. Her current situation may be the result of a successful escape attempt, but it's not a legal punishment."

"Okay take that *bracelets* away from her, so that she can occupy half of the department again. But why to hell is it important to lure her to Bruce's mansion, if you want to do that anyway? Why don't you simply go to that bar, free her and..."

"As I also told you, I do not intend to let her off the hook, Babs, at least not completely. She has challenged me personally, and that means, I'll keep an eye on her, and to satisfy you, that will definitely put an end to her criminal career."

"You make simple things complicated," Barbara accused her. "Throw that key away, and everything will be fine."

"No! Again, this is not an option.

She'll try to obtain the key, and I'll catch her red-handed. Then we'll have a long and hopefully fruitful talk about good and evil, and just in case, this doesn't have the desired effect, I'll rightfully impose a few rules on her, call them individual-related laws, which I'll enforce. That's the proper way to handle such a case."

"And if Kitty-Cat simply goes to the job interview, you offered her? Wouldn't your show look a little bit stupid? After all I bet, she's appointed herself for her current job, which suits her quite well, ordinarily as any other of those waitresses."

"This will not happen," Kara claimed.

"Why not? If she's accepted as a maid, she'll have plenty of time to fulfill her plans, if not, she'll know, where he lives and can burgle the house later. It would be stupid to rob our fictitious Harry before, and 'Kitty-Cat isn't stupid'."

"It will not happen, because she has to go to this job interview wearing those *cuffs*. Remember, I've told her, that our fictitious conspirator Harry's a *handcuff*-collector. A collector wants to investigate these *cuffs*, take a close look at them. If she goes there, she's to admit, that she cannot take them off and that he's her only hope to get rid of them, because they are unpickable and quasi-indestructible. She would have to bow herself to him unconditionally. And that's something someone as proud as her, will never do."

"And you've planned all this?" Barbara was still sceptical. "Kitty-Cat's not predictable," she argued. "She's never been. What if she plans to kill him anyway?"

"She is definitely not a murderess, a murderess wouldn't have called an ambulance for the guys, who tried to rob her."

"No, Kitty-Cat's a nuisance, but no murderess, However there's a third possibility, as likely as the others: Kitty-Cat does not go to the job interview, but waits a few weeks and burgles the place later," Barbara theorized. "We can't wait 'till she strikes. She won't find the desired keys, but Batman'll loose a few valuable possessions, she'll take with her or destroy accidentally or on purpose. He'll have no proof against her and blame it on us."

"No I don't think this is a realistic scenario," Kara rejected her reasoning. "Kitty-Cat's smart but deeply frustrated. She's so eager to get rid of 'her' *cuffs* one way or the other, she won't wait."

In the end Kara's persistence paid off. Barbara had to accept, that her Kryptonian fellow heroine was determined to handle this case her way and that there was no way to change her mind.



To catch Kitty-Cat was a full-time job, Barbara couldn't participate in due to her official duties and did not want to take part in due to the aforementioned differences. So it was decided, that Kara would undertake this mainly on her own.

The first night and day Kara spent in the garage of Bruce Wayne's mansion was completely uneventful, and it was only an hour before sunrise in the second night, when Kara's sharp ears noted the sound

of a car climbing the steep lonely road to Batman's mansion. The motor of the car stopped. Then everything was quite.

Immediately Kara was on alert. The quietness lasted a quarter, and after that it required the enhanced senses of the superheroine to realize, that someone was working on the lock of the side door. The opening of this door and Catwoman's actual entrance escaped Kara's strongly enhanced senses. She checked the monitor of Bruce Wayne's state of the art electronic burglar alert at once. It was dead.

"Kitty-Cat's really good," Kara had to admit. It required X-ray vision to see a feminine form investigating the contents of Bruce Wayne's garage in the complete darkness of a moonless night. Carefully not to make any noise she entered the garage by the entrance from the house side. Catwoman immediately froze.

"Damned, she REALLY has the senses of a cat," Supergirl thought and froze in her movement, too. Catwoman was on all fours. There was a small metallic tinkle. Presumably the irremovable *chain* between her wrists had hit something.

Kara was in range of the switch and switched the light on. Immediately the human cat found coverage. If Kara would not have been Supergirl, she would not have noticed more than a shadow.

"Kitty-Cat, I've, what you've been coming for." She grabbed the small key with two fingers and raised it theatrically for Selina to see. Everything stayed quite.

"Selina, that's the only key to your *handcuffs*, and I'm here to release you,

but if you're too chicken-hearted to come out, you won't get it." These provocative speech reached its goal. There she was. Selina had raised herself to full height.

She wore the mask and the artificial cat ears, she was famous for. Her long legs, Kara had admired in the Bondage Club, were clad into skin-tight black leather trousers. In contrast to the public opinion the original of the famous catsuit consisted of two parts, but the seam was covered by an utility belt similar to Batman's. For obvious reasons she used to carry a similar ensemble of useful tools for her trade as the Dark Knight.

She had exchanged her high heels for the cat-boots. However, she had been forced to replace the upper part of the catsuit by a sleeveless black leather tube top. She would not have been able to get dressed otherwise, because the *metal bracelets* on her wrists were still joined by the short *chain*. As expected Selina Kyle was still *handcuffed*, and she was not fond of it. Kara observed, that the short silver *chain* joining 'her' *bracelets* was taught.

"You did this to me," she said referring to the now sparkling unbreakable bond between her hands. "For you I'm just a criminal, who belongs behind bars. Why should I believe you?" She maintained a few meters of distance from Supergirl.

"I've worn them too," Kara replied sympathetically. "I know how it feels."

"For two weeks only," Selina objected matter-of-factly and added, "I've worn them for more than three month."

"Don't you think, that you deserve a

little punishment, Kitty Cat? For example for stealing them from Rupert Morgan, for getting Diana and me arrested, for this little joke with the Kryptonite-collar, for...?" Kara went down the list.

"Okay," Selina interrupted her, "what do you want me to do to get these off?"

"Not much," Kara said and smiled, "first of all you can loan me some of your precious time to talk to each other."

"Nobody in Gotham does something for nothing," Selina objected with a bitter smile behind her mask. "Don't beat about the bush. What do you REALLY want?"

"I'm not from Gotham," Kara corrected her, "I was born on Krypton."

"That makes no difference in this matter," Selina replied offensively.

"Do you know that you're wearing the 'Bracelets of Aphrodite'?" Kara asked.

"I know the story," Selina revealed unexpected knowledge. "She cheated on her husband, and he made these and punished her by locking them on her. The legend tells, that she was committed to wear them for seven years. Actually he did a good job. I'm not able to take them off either. But you know that already."

"I was not able to free myself from them also," Kara admitted, "and that was even more remarkable. But that's not the point. The Goddess was tamed and remained faithful while wearing them."

"And...?" Selina's voice was tart.

"It seems to work. You're quite tame as well, right now," Kara replied, "you even got yourself a regular employment."

"There's not much a girl can do with

those on her wrists," Selina gave back.

"You did a good job, nevertheless," Kara said, "you're very talented."

"I knew, that it was you and that bitch, Batgirl, who lured me to this place, once I saw you here." Selina said. "Congratulations you two have fooled me. Did you have fun in pushing me around?"

"Your services were, let's say, adequate," Kara replied, "more than that."

"Then take these off and let me go," Selina demanded shaking her wrists.

"Actually, I did not want to fleece you. I want to trade them for this brand new pair of *bat-cuffs* – in the back please."

"Why should I trade one pair of *hand-cuffs* for another?" Selina asked frankly.

"Because you'll be able to open those yourself," Kara replied, "and you're obviously not able to do this with these now."

"And if I don't want these new *cuffs*?"

"Then you can keep those, they suit you very well." Selina took a deep breath.

"That's blackmail, but I'll do, what you want," she said. "Just take them off."

"Just one more thing," Kara remarked.

"What else?" She opened her bag and took out a blue shimmering metal object.

"Just a necklace with a piece of *chain*," she explained. "I want your hands to stay behind you back for the time being."

"I won't be able to drive with my hands fixed like this," Selina argued.

"You can't drive with a pair of *bat-cuffs* anyway, they are very narrow and *hinged*. Besides presumably it isn't your car either." She handled her, what looked like a *steel* collar. "Put it on." Selina taxed it.

“What is it?” The Cat was suspicious. “A neat radio sender, that I can’t take off tells you anytime where I am?” She asked.

“No just a symbol of your good will,” Kara made an attempt to address her concerns, “you may take it off yourself later.”

“And if I don’t put it on?” Selina asked directly. “Will you use your super powers in order to force it around my throat?”

“No, but I will conclude from such a behavior, that you don’t deserve to get those *bracelets* off. You can accept my offer or leave it,” Kara said firmly. “Of course, I will interpret your denial of my polite request as a signal that you are willing to continue to steal from spotless citizen, and in this case I might be convinced to apply you for a full board residential in the Gotham City jail, where you can toy with your *bracelets*.” Selina swallowed.

“Do I have a choice?” She asked.

“Just between these two alternatives,” Kara was merciless. “I would put this onto my throat, if I were you, but...” Reluctantly Catwoman took the collar from her hands and did, what she requested.

“Turn it around, so that the *chain*’s at your back.” She complied hesitatingly.

“Pleased?” Selina asked bitterly.

“Yes. Now step through your *cuffs* like you did when you served us.” Selina knew that she had not really a choice. Reluctantly she did, what Kara requested, turned around, bowed her back and extended her joined wrists. It was a *déjà-vu*.

“Pleased,... Mistress?” She asked.

“You did very well, Kitty-Cat,” Kara replied and fitted the *bat-cuffs* through the

elongated link of the *steel chain* that dangled along Selina’s spine. It was not unintentional, that this arrangement resembled the one, she had envisioned for Kara.

“Mistress, may I rub my wrists before you put on those *bat-cuffs*?” Selina asked. “I mean I’ve been wearing these *cuffs* for three month, and I think I deserve...”

“No, Kitty-Cat. You are a very dangerous animal,” Kara rejected the idea. “I don’t want to lead you into temptation.”

“Very well, Mistress,” Selina mumbled, and Kara closed the *bat-cuffs* around her wrists and engaged the double locks.

“Now comes the moment,” she said ceremonially and unlocked “Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*” slowly from Selina’s wrists.

“How does it feel, Kitty-Cat?” She asked. Selina shrugged her shoulders.

“Not much different from before,” she replied. “My hands are still *cuffed*.”

“And you’ll stay like this for a while. It improves your attitude,” Kara said and clipped a leather leash onto a conveniently placed ring on the collar, which encircled Selina’s throat. “Come on, Kitty-Cat, let’s continue our small-talk in a more comfortable surrounding...”

“Didn’t you forget something, Mistress?” Selina asked rather seriously.

“I don’t know?” Kara was perplexed.

“*Leg-irons*, of course, Mistress,” Selina stated quite seriously, indicating her free legs. “I feel almost naked without them.”

“Oh, those.” Kara smiled. “Sorry, Kitty-Cat, I will buy you a pair next time.”

“Where are you taking me, Mistress?”

“I intent to spend some quality time

with you. I'm going to teach you something about good and evil." She released her leash. "Go ahead, dear, I don't think, you will outrun me, even without *irons*."

"As you wish, Mistress." Kara followed her unwilling, but so far cooperative prisoner. She saw, that her fingers busily investigated the *bat-cuffs* that held her wrists much closer together than "Aphrodite's *Bracelets*" had done. She was also forced by them to keep them parallel to each other.

Kara heard a suppressed curse. Selina joined hands went around her waist, as far as possible. Obviously she wanted to take a look at their confinement to confirm, what her deft fingers seemed to have felt.

"Something's wrong, Kitty-Cat?"

"No, Mistress, I just realized that the manufacturer of these 'bracelets' did a lousy job and omitted the key holes. You should get a part of your money back."

"No, it's okay, Kitty. You are wearing the latest model 'C' of the *bat-cuffs*, where 'C' stands for Catwoman. Batman was tired of inventing new locks, you would pick in minutes. I guess you'll have the opportunity to wear them more often."

"I don't care." Selina retorted.

"That's, what I call spirit, Kitty-Cat. Make yourself comfortable with them."

"May I raise a complaint, Mistress?"

"Sure, dear. What displeases you?"

"They are too tight, Mistress," Selina replied. "My hands are getting numb."

"Let me see." Kara took a hold on Selina's confined wrists and confirmed, that they were snug, but not over-tight.

"No Kitty-Cat, they are fine. That you

can't turn your little wrists around inside, is not a bug but a feature. We don't want little Kitty become coltish, do we?"

"No, Mistress," she replied, "but I can assure you, that I can't slip them off, even if you give me one or two notches more."

"Next time, Kitty-Cat, next time. Once those double locks are set, even I can't loosen those *cuffs* without destroying them, and these neat little accessories suit you so well, that it would be a pity to damage them, don't you think so?"

"Yes, Mistress. They are purrfect. However, how long do you want to parade me around outdoors like this?"

"I thought, we will make a little excursion to the cape, Kitty, the trail starts around the bend, just stay on the left. I'm glad you did not come with high heels."

"As you wish, Mistress." The trail was small and steep, so Kara had to follow Selina, who kept a fast pace, although she had no use of her hands for ballance.

"Selina, you are not completely bad," Kara began after a while, "I saw, that you did not kill a bunch of robbers, when they attacked you, and that you even called an ambulance. Bad girls don't do that."

"Good girls, don't get *handcuffed*."

"Did I say, you're a good girl?" Kara asked back, and Selina shook her head.

"You remember me about a school days friend of mine, back on Krypton." Kara tried to break the ice. "She was a lot like you, rebellious, but not really bad."

"I am not rebellious," Selina replied.

"Nevertheless, I don't want the same to happen to you, what happened to her.

She had to learn things the hard way.”

“Did you have a little *handcuff*-talk with her, too?” Selina asked provokingly.

“No, but someone else had, well sort of. She was a gifted woman like you, but did not understand, that talents don’t come for free,” Kara explained patiently. “They come with the responsibility to do something for the society. Not criminal energy, but a wrongly understood sense of justice carried her on the wrong track.”

“Well, I don’t see any similarities.”

“You are a very gifted woman, not only by human standards. Although you don’t have superpowers, you have the potential to make a difference in this world. Instead of stealing from other people, for whatever reasons you should use your gift to prevent thefts, to make this city a better place to live, like e.g. Batman does.”

“I do, what, I think, is necessary to make this city a better place. What is better or not, depends on the point of view.”

“No you don’t,” Kara said. “But you will, and you’ll do it the way, I prescribe. From now on I’ll keep an eye on your activities, and, if they go off track, you’ll be punished by me, if possible before any harm’s done. Do you understand this?”

“Look, Supergirl. It’s you, who does not understand anything. It would be easier, if you turn me over to the authorities right now, and that’s it,” Selina suggested.

“You would be out of jail with in days. That makes no sense,” Kara retorted. Catwoman shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, Batman and Batgirl have tried to do so more than once,” she replied.

“But obviously without success,” Kara stated. “However this talk’s not about Batman and Batgirl. I also don’t want to interfere with your little private war.”

“I appreciate this,” she replied truthfully. Kara looked at her from one side.

“You really like Batman, don’t you?” This casual and unmotivated question struck Selina like a slap in the face.

“No!” she tugged on ‘her’ *bat-cuffs*. “I hate him. He’s my worst enemy,” she replied a little bit louder than necessary.

“You could have killed him once,” Kara, who had observed her carefully, remarked. “Why should a heinous villain like you waste such an opportunity?”

“Thrice,” Selina corrected her quietly without answering the question. “I had the opportunity to kill him three times.”

“Okay, three times then. But obviously you didn’t,” Kara stated. “Why?”

“He’s not worth to die a honored death,” she said theatrically, but Kara noticed, that there was no fire in these words. They sounded like a lame excuse.

“To be shot in the back is hardly a honored death,” Kara, who remembered her talk with Barbara, replied. “He could have killed you more than once, too, but he also let you slide, I guess, on purpose,” Kara stated. “Why do think HE did so?”

“You’ve to ask Batman about it.”

“Maybe it’s the same reason, why you didn’t kill him? Maybe he likes you, too?” Kara asked. “You never thought about it?”

“I DON’T like him!” Selina replied once again a little bit louder than necessary.

“Okay. Have you ever killed some-

one?” Kara asked. I don’t mean in combat, I mean someone, who was not able to defend himself anymore?” Selina shook her head, almost angry to admit this.

“It violates my pride. If I kill someone I’ll have to look in his eyes,” she replied cold-blooded, but not convincingly.

“Maybe you’ve a little voice in the back of your head, that tells you what’s right or not, a voice named conscience?” Kara inquired. “Maybe you’re not as notorious as you want me believe you to be?”

“Supergirl, if I were an upholder of moral standards like you, I probably wouldn’t wear those *handcuffs* right now.”

“If I would consider you to be a hopeless criminal, I might have brought you to a prison, no human can escape from already,” Kara retorted. They had reached the cape. It was early in the morning and the two of them were the only ones to admire the beautiful sight, the Cat had no eyes for. She assumed a straight posture legs slightly apart like a soldier on duty.

“Relax, Selina, we are not on the drill ground,” Kara remarked generously.

“Then, Mistress, if you don’t mind, you may remove these,” she answered with reference to the *bat-cuffs* on her wrists, she brought around her hips.

“Not so fast, Kitty-Cat,” Kara replied, “you are not off the hook – not yet.”

“As you wish, Mistress,” there was a mocking undertone in her voice. The Cat had concluded, that Supergirl for whatever reasons did not intend to throw her into jail. To show that was a big mistake. Kara changed her tactics immediately.

“You are a tough one, Kitty-Cat. However if you want to play the game, then it will be a pleasure for me to join it,” she said with fierceness in her voice.

“What do you mean?” Selina asked.

“I could afford a housemaid, who does all the daily duties, I do not want to do myself, and I thought about hiring you for free board and lodging,” Kara suggested.

“I’m not interested!” Selina replied.

“I am not interested, WHAT?”

“I am not interested, Mistress.”

“You’ll not be asked, and incidentally you’re on the top of my wanted list.”

“But I would prefer to go to jail.”

“You would prefer to go to jail,... WHAT?” Kara insisted stubbornly.

“Mistress – I would prefer to go to jail, Mistress.” Selina hurried to clarify.

“That’s much too insecure. It’s much better for the public safety, that I keep you under my personal control, isn’t it?”

“No, I don’t,” Selina replied. “But I guess, I won’t be asked anyway, Mistress.”

“Very well, Kitty-Cat,” Kara said, “you’re hired. Let’s go back to the road. Move slow and carefully. I don’t want you to hurt yourself. I’m going to rely on your services, you know. Remember, that I’m directly behind you,” Kara threatened.

“As you wish,... Mistress.” They went back to the road quietly. Secretly she hoped, that Kara wasn’t serious. But, when Kara ordered a Taxi per cell phone to fetch them, Selina exclaimed: “You want us to ride a Taxi, with me like this?”

“The people in Gotham are used to you being arrested.” The taxi driver was

not so used to seeing a cat-like clad lady in *handcuffs*, but he recognized Supergirl.

“Wow, Supergirl, it’s a pleasure to drive you,” he greeted them. “What did this lady do to deserve your attention?”

“She’s violated the traffic laws. I had to arrest her,” Kara lied, then she whispered, “I think I’ll set her free, but not without teaching her a lesson. Would you bring us to the following place?” She named the address of a shop in the outskirts, which sold bondage gear. The ride was uneventful and the cab driver refused to take any money from Kara, because she’d had saved the city and it was something, he would tell his grand children about, and... Kara did not really listen.

“You don’t get me inside!” Selina stated, when he departed. Kara took a firm hold on the leash and attracted her.

“Do you want to bet on it?” She asked.

“Look, Supergirl, I know, that you can force me inside, but to what purpose?”

“Prepare you for your duties as my maid,” Kara replied. “My first priority’s the safety of this city. I don’t want to spend my spare time trying to catch you.”

“I’ll tell everyone that you kidnapped me and...” Kara attracted her effortlessly.

“... that you’re the notorious Catwoman, I caught red-handed in her well known outfit.” She finished the sentence.

“You promised to set me free.”

“That’s right, but I did not say when.”

“Kryptonians are worse than Armenian salesman, no honest woman can trust them,” Selina muttered, but Kara’s much enhanced senses caught the words.

“Did you say something?” She asked.

“No,... Mistress.” She gave her deliberately some slack, before she attracted her again. Selina had no choice but to follow her. This way they entered the shop.

“Ah Supergirl and Catwoman. It’s a pleasure to serve local heroes,” a sales woman in a shrill and skimpy outfit, which could be characterized as ‘kinky’ greeted the involuntary odd couple.

“Well, we are not the real ones, of course” Kara introduced them, “but if you like to call us this way, it will be okay.”

“Of course,” the lady replied. “Miss... eh, Supergirl, what can I do for you?”

“Kitty-Cat here’s looking for a pair of *leg-irons*, she likes them short and secure.”

“Of course, Catwoman,” she turned to Selina, “would you accompany me?”

“If you don’t mind, I’ll accompany you, too,” Kara said, “Kitty-Cat’s not fully adapted to her job as my personal slave yet and still in need of some supervision.”

“Don’t listen to her,” Selina said, “I can make my own choices.” Kara attracted her seemingly playfully, but with the irresistible power of a Kryptonian.

“Kitty-Cat,” she said, “you’re a naughty pussy cat. How often have I told you not to act naughtily in the presense of adults?” She glared at Selina. “One more time and I’ll put you over my knee right here in the presence of this lady.”

“I am sorry,... Mistress,” Selina aware, what Kara could do, hurried to reply.

“You see, Kitty-Cat needs a firm hand sometimes,” Kara said to the woman with a winning smile. “Can you show us a few

pairs of matching *anklets* for Kitty-Cat?”

“No problem, Miss Supergirl,” was the reply. “We’ve a fairly big assortment.”

“How long do you want to play this stupid charade, Supergirl?” Selina asked seriously, after the saleswoman had left, in order to fetch the requested items.

“Oh I’m quite serious,” Kara explained. “If you work for me as my well-secured housemaid, you are well occupied and can’t run around and rob people.”

“If I wouldn’t be *handcuffed*, I would...” Selina pressed through her teeth.

“No empty threats, Kitty-Cat...” Kara countered. She interrupted herself, when the saleswoman returned. “Oh no, no leather *cuffs*, Kitty-Cat likes *steel*, don’t you Kitty-Cat?” Selina gave her a black look, but remained quite. “Please try this pair first, they look as if they were made for your little ankles.” She fetched the most solid pair, which also sported a very short *chain*, and handed it to the woman. “Kitty-Cat really likes those, don’t you?”

“Go to hell!” Selina replied furiously.

“Kitty-Cat, if you don’t behave, I’ll buy a gag too. – Put them on her legs. She likes to hiss a little bit, but she does not bite,” Kara addressed the saleswoman: Selina received the *irons* and had to make a few turns, which she reluctantly did.

“They’re fine, as if they were made for our little Kitty-Cat,” Kara announced. “Let me take a look at them. Please come to me and turn around.” Selina had no choice but to do as Kara said. The latter pretended to eye her new *anklets*, but used her heat vision to weld their locks shut.

This went unnoticed by the saleswoman and also literally behind Selina’s back.

“They’re fine, very fine and very secure. I’ll buy them – oh no, don’t remove them, they’re just, where they belong. Just give me the keys and I’ll pay for them. Wait a minute for me, Kitty-Cat, and don’t run away.” When she returned, Selina had already found out that ‘her’ new *irons* had been welded on. Kara led her out of the shop on her leash.

“You need some practicing, Kitty-Cat,” she said, “Mr. Wayne, the billionaire, has offered me a stay for a few days. He likes to surround himself by beautiful woman. I think, he will be delighted to watch you improving your skills in servicing him and his guests.” It was pleasing to watch Selina fight the unyielding *restraints*. The idea of serving the well-known playboy was not appealing to the Cat, or should she know against all odds, who Mr. Wayne really was? Kara smiled.

“Okay, Supergirl, you win,” Selina hissed the flag. “I’ll do, whatever you demand from me, but stop pushing me around, as if I were your personal slave.”

“Well, you’re a clever girl. This should show you, what might happen and that I’m deadly serious about it. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Mistress.” Selina replied hastily.

“Okay, Kitty-Cat. I don’t want you to promise something, because I don’t trust you anyway. So I’ll just state, what will be allowed for you and what not. Do you understand me?” Selina nodded quietly.

“Good,” Kara said, “and to clear this point first: Since I don’t trust you, the

precondition for your release is, that you'll wear that collar from now on. Your suspicion is true. It's indeed a sophisticated tracking device, which can tell me anytime, where you are. Do you object?"

"No,... Mistress."

"You won't have a choice anyway," Kara explained, "it's made from Kryptonian super metal, locked with a Kryptonian seal, and just in case, you should be bored and tempted to work on it, it's fitted with a small explosive charge, that's nevertheless big enough to blow your head away, if it goes off accidentally. This is no hoax. I don't think, you want you to loose your head?" Kara threatened.

"No,... Mistress."

"Good, Kitty-Cat. So you know, that I can and will track you down and punish you, if you should dare to disobey my rules, any of my rules." She looked into Selina's eyes, demanding an answer.

"Yes,... Mistress."

"Fine. The first rule is: You won't steal anything anymore. Neither from Rupert Morgan nor from anyone else, from nobody. If something does not lawfully belong to you, you don't touch it. Okay?"

"Yes,... Mistress."

"The second rule is: Don't meet with local gangsters. Neither with the local bosses, nor with small crooks. If someone's a certain reputation or's been in jail for this or that reason it's forbidden for you to meet him or her in the first place. We don't talk about conspiracies etc. Just meeting's forbidden! Is that clear?"

"Yes,... Mistress."

"And the last rule: Don't interfere with police activities or with activities of the local crime-fighters, like Batgirl, Batman or me. If one of us takes action, from now on you'll stay away," Kara demanded.

"You begrudge me any fun,... Mistress," Selina dared to answer mockingly.

"That's not funny, Kitty-Cat. You'll obey or...," Kara paused for effect.

"... or what, Mistress? What's the punishment for an accidental disregard of one of these rules? – I've to know that."

"It depends on the gravity of the disregard," Kara replied angrily. "In any case it means, that they'll go back on for a certain time." She took 'Aphrodite's *Bracelets*' out of her pocket for emphasis. "If you play it too rough, it might mean, that you won't see Gotham again. I'm not joking, I'm Kryptonian. Don't forget this!"

"Yes,... Mistress."

"Good," Kara said, "since we've settled our little differences, you're off the hook. You may go, where you wish to go, and do, what you want to do, as long as you obey the rules, I've just given you." She turned in order to leave, like Kryptonians used to leave, namely to fly away.

"Didn't you forget something?" Selina still mocking voice called her back.

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"I'm fully *shackled* at a public place," she replied seriously, "you cannot leave me here like this. It's against your rules."

"Can't I?" Kara asked, "you're the Cat. You can deal with it. This way you'll get a little impression, what might happen, if you get the idea to disobey my

rules.” With this words she turned and left Selina restrained on the boardwalk of a small street in Gotham’s outskirts .

Unexpected by Kara that did not pose a real problem for the Cat. Selina managed to hide in a small side way, where she fetched, what looked like a big pencil, out of her utility belt. She pushed a button, and a dark blue laser beam emanated from, what had been a prototype of Wayne Enterprises, and cut through her *shackles*. The capacity was limited, but before it ran out of power, Selina was almost rid of the *shackles*, Kara had imposed on her, and completely unhampered.

For a moment the Cat enjoyed to be free of *wrist restraints* for the first time in three month. She had not dared to touch the collar. It was undoubtedly fabricated from Kryptonian super metal. That alone posed a REAL problem, which required sophisticated technology, no one could carry around, in order to resolve it, and, if it was indeed fitted with an explosive charge, even that bore a deadly risk.

Selina decided not to try it out at least not yet. After she reached her flat unnoticed, she changed into street clothes. She quitted her employment at “The Bondage Bar” immediately per telephone. The Cat had saved some money from this job, and a first class degree from Harvard business school should allow her to obtain a less humiliating one soon.

Naturally the embarrassing tracking-collar was on top of her list. The locks were most likely electronic ones, but based on Kryptonian technology, about

which not much was available. She did not dare to attack it by force, although she had some idea in the back of her mind how to do this, mainly because of the possibly incorporated explosive charge.

However, based on the reasonable assumption, the tracking signal was an electromagnetic one, it could be shielded by metal. Selina fetched aluminum foil from her kitchen equipment and wrought it in several, dense layers around ‘her’ collar. This ought to block Kara’s signal. A fashionable scarf hid the unattractive metal object from the views of casual observers.

Selina was smart enough to know that Supergirl would notice the disappearance of her tracking signal, and she had rightly guessed, that it would not be wise to stay any longer at this place. What she did not know, was, that Barbara informed by Kara had used her absence to install an illegal Trojan program on her computer in the meantime, which had noticed, that she had transferred money, she had earned in the Bondage Bar, from one of her accounts to a giro account.

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When she arrived at the bank in order to collect this money, an angry Kara awaited her already at the front-entrance.

“You’ve set a new record for disobedience,” she greeted her. “Hands, Kitty-Cat,” she demanded and produced, what looked like ‘Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*’. Selina considered crying for help, but considering that the Kryptonian could accelerate

to a speed, which allowed her to kidnap her without being noticed by the human eye, this was not a promising solution.

“Oh, no,” she protested instead, “I did not violate any of your damned rules.”

“Yes, you did, Kitty-Cat,” Kara stated. “Rule number three says not to interfere with my or the other crimefighters activities. By wrapping that metal around your collar, you’ve interfered with my oversight of your little activities and this demands for punishment.” Slowly she removed first the scarf and then the radiation blocking metal foil from “her” collar.

Selina let her do it. Fighting the Girl of Steel by hands was not promising.

“I just wanted to hide this thing,” she advocated her action, “it’s not fair and...”

“Probably you’re lucky, that I found you so quickly, before you could commit more,” Kara cut her defensive speech, “so your punishment will not be too severe.”

“GO TO HELL,” Selina exclaimed.

“Hands, Kitty-Cat, or I’ll hurt you.” Reluctantly Selina extended her wrists together her hands turned outwards. Fighting the Kryptonian without extensive preparations was not an option. Kara clicked the indestructable *bracelets* around Selina’s wrists turned and removed the key. Selina stared first at her freshly joined hands, then into Kara’s blue eyes.

“How long do I have to wear them?” She asked, shaking the *chain* between her freshly joined wrists in true despair.

“Six month, Kitty-Cat,” Kara replied calmly, “in six month you may ask me for having them removed, provided you won’t break my rules a second time.”

“WHAT?” Selina blurted out. Her fists were clenched, the four inch *chain* that connected the locked *bracelets* was taught. “Six months? I didn’t do anything but wrapping a piece of metal foil around this humiliating collar. That’s inhuman.”

“Right, Kitty-Cat, but I’m not human. In fact you’ve been lucky. Kryptonian laws require to double the original sentence, as long as you’re on probation in case of ANY violation of your probation conditions. And that’s, what you are, Kitty-Cat, a prisoner on probation – my prisoner. See you later.” With these words she left a furious Selina back in the center of Gotham, again *handcuffed* without hope for release in the near future.

Selina could only cancel her scheduled visit at the bank per cell phone and try to hide her reacquired *handcuffs* as good as possible on her way back to her flat.

The Trojan program was easily discovered and removed. Half a dozen bugs installed by Barbara were also found and successively disabled. This was ridiculously easy for the Cat. However it was too late. Expecting a return of the Kryptonian after that, she stared at her hands respectively the short silver *chain* swinging between them, but nothing happened. On the other hand, what could Kara do? She was wearing those *bracelets* already.

When nobody showed up, Selina complained about her her own imprudence. Obviously she was no longer regarded as a serious contender. Supergirl and Batgirl had fooled her too easily.

Chapter 11

Kidnapped

Selina fumed. Kara assumed, she would be desperate, but she had underestimated Catwoman's fighting spirit.

Again fitted with the unbreakable *Adamant handcuffs* and a new, nearly unbreakable and possibly explosive collar from Kryptonian super metal, Selina had to accept, that she was no match to any of the caped crime-fighters right now and even worse that she could be detected by the Kryptonian anytime anywhere.

But if an enemy could not be defeated by force, it had to be done by cleverness. Selina considered her brain to be the best weapon she had, and she was resourceful.

Batman had always been aware of this; he could not be tricked easily, but Batgirl and the Kryptonian super bitch, what she called Kara, thought, that a cropped Cat was not worth to waste a thought at.

Selina was determined to prove them wrong. It was widely known in certain circles, that green Kryptonite produced by Luther Corp. was able to reduce Kryptonians to more or less human strength.

Kryptonians, who heavily relied on their physical superiority, were not very skilled in fighting, once the latter was lost. While fighting Batman or even Batgirl was not an option, as long as she was *braceleted*, Selina concluded that fighting Kara might be feasible, once she would have lost her super strength. Provided she managed to achieve this, there should be a way to obtain the keys to her *handcuffs* and collar from the arrogant Kryptonian.

The only one in Gotham with ties to Luther Corp. except for the Penguin was the Joker, a sinister villain, Selina was not very fond to deal with. But she knew that the presence of Kara had a serious impact on his business. Therefore taking Kara out of action might be a common goal.

"It's me, the Cat," she introduced herself on the phone after she had dialed a secret number. "I need to talk to the Jester, it's about business, a profitable business."

"Ah, the pussy cat. Rumor says, you are a cropped little pet by now." It was Harley Quin, Joker's right hand. She dis-

liked Selina, and this complicated things.

“Listen, Harlequin. To keep it short, I found a way, which might work to take the super bitch out of action for a long, long time, maybe forever. But I need green Kryptonite from Luther Corp. to realize my plans. Tell your master about it. You know the mail box, where he can leave an answer. He’s time until the day after tomorrow.” She hung up the phone.

Harley was a fiendish bitch. If she was in bad mood, she might simply ignore her call. Angrily she gave her *wrist chain* the habitual tug. Its presence violated her pride. Her plan to get it off had to work. The next day she received a mail message.

“You haven’t been very successful last time. Synthetic Green Kryptonite’s expensive and short-lived. Give me a good reason, why this effort’s promising or look for another supplier.” The address was meaningless, but Selina was sure, that her answer would not be overlooked.

“I’ve the opportunity to meet the super bitch in a few days, and I’ve acquired a ‘magic’ device, which can take her out of action for a fairly long time. If you want to know more, we’ve to meet,” she replied.

What she did not tell him, was that she wore the mentioned “magic” device already on her own wrists and that her plan required no less than to overpower a weakened Kara, acquire the key from her in order to remove it from her own wrists, transfer it to Kara’s and hide the latter well enough that the Kryptonian would not be able to find it for a fairly long time.

Kryptonite would not strip Kara of

her powers for long, but the *bracelets* would hamper the superheroine considerably and limit her actions, provided she did not like to appear in public wearing them. That an infuriated Kryptonian, *braceleted* or not, was a formidable enemy, seeking for bloody revenge, was a matter, Selina did not want to think about yet.

The reply was short: “Tomorrow at 5 AM in the airport storehouse no. 13. You alone, no weapons.” That was “great news”, she would have to face one of the most dangerous criminals in Gotham, two hours after finishing her reassumed services at the “Bondage Club”. Nevertheless, she had no choice. Nobody else could provide her with green Kryptonite.

The first precaution measure was to wrap the metal foil around her collar. Of course the Kryptonian would be alarmed now and try to catch her, so a fast change of position was highly recommended. From now on she also had to watch for Supergirl trying to track her down.

“High, Pussy Cat,” one hour later a tired Selina was greeted by Harley Quin, who aimed with a large caliber pistol at her body. “Show me your hands.” Selina lifted her poncho and raised her hands.

“Nice *bracelets*, Pussy Cat. They suit you. Take that cowpuncher shirt off. I’ve to check you for weapons.” Reluctantly Selina removed the garment. She wore only a tank top and a pair of jeans below.

“Now step through that pretty *chain* between your *bracelets*.” Harley ordered.

“I’m not here for playing games, Harlekin.” She raised her joined hands. “I

have no weapons on me as you can see. I've to talk to your Lord and Master."

"You're not in a position to raise any claims, Pussy Cat. I've my orders from the Joker himself. So go on" Reluctantly Selina stepped through the *chain* and thereby transferred 'her' *handcuffs* from front to back, well aware, that this reduced her abilities to defend herself even further. Selina was alerted, when Harley produced a pair of Darby-style *handcuffs*.

"Look, Quin, with my hands behind my back, I'm hardly in the position to harm anybody," she argued reasonably.

"Turn around, bitch. You've always been a trickster. I won't take any chances with you." Harley exploited the situation.

"Quin, I'm here to discuss an enterprise in mutual interest, and I won't..."

"You're free to leave, Pussy Cat," Harley interrupted her. "But if you want that Kryptonite, you've to do what I say, literally, now." Grudgingly Selina turned around. Reluctantly she allowed her to fix the additional pair of *cuffs* on her elbows.

They were not tight and had a fairly long *chain*, but Selina was well aware, that she would not be able to switch her hands from back to front anymore with them in place. Even worse, she would not be able to even reach these *cuffs* with her fingers. However, Harley was not finished yet.

"These go on your legs," she produced another pair of short *chained* Darby-style *leg-irons*, "and don't dare to kick at me, Pussy Cat." Selina endured this as well. Finally she took a short *chain* leash and clipped it on Kara's disguised col-

lar around her throat, which was conveniently equipped with a ring at the front.

"Now we're ready to go, Pussy Cat." She tugged on the leash. A further personal search was obviously not necessary, since Selina had deliberately relinquished to take any weapon with her. She was led by Harley to a storage room, which contained no more than a sturdy, hardly human sized cage on wheels. Three black haired man in black suits awaited them. The Joker himself was not among them.

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"That's Gotham's famous Catwoman, Mr. Hussein," Harley announced with triumph in her voice. "The *bracelets* and the collar ought to be escape-proof, but, I would suggest, that you replace the other *restraints* by welded ones. She's a master in lock-picking." Selina knew immediately, that Harley had never intended to lead her to the Joker, presumably she had not even told him about Selina's proposal.

The resulting fight was short. Tightly restrained, as she was, she was no match to the three men, who were well build and no novices in martial art either. Soon Selina ended up kneeling in the cage.

Welding equipment was available – it had been supplied already for precisely this purpose – and the cage was welded shut. Following Harley's suggestion additional welds were applied, which assured reliably, that she would not be able to take the additional *restraints* off soon, she had Harley generously allowed to fix on her. Selina cursed her lack of caution.

A ball-gag had also been forced into her mouth in order to make sure, she would not be able to call for help later. In addition a black leather hood covered her head, which had holes at nose and mouth, allowed her to breathe, but robbed her of her eye-sight and reduced her hearing.

Arabian names, dark hair and eyes she had spotted, before she had been hooded – it was not difficult to conclude, that Harley had sold her profitably to a powerful Arabian sheik or businessman. Presumably she should be shipped as diplomatic baggage. It would be foolish to put any hope on the American customs.

The cage was rolled on a ramp, covered by a plane and lifted off. That was repeated several times, before it came to rest in, what appeared to be the cargo bay of a plane. It was cold. The flight was long, uneventful and an experience Selina was not fond to repeat. Caged and closely *shackled* she could only await the arrival.

There was no intermediate stop. The plane took the direct way, which lasted more than twenty hours, Selina had to endure in her cage without water and food and awfully tasting ball-gag in her mouth. Finally the plane landed without trouble. Hot dry air flooded the plain. A stacker crane loaded her cage on a truck. Nobody seemed to care for its human content.

Her involuntary journey finally ended in the delivery area of an oriental palace. The plane was lifted, and a man used a grinding tool to remove the lock of ‘her’ cage, which had been sealed by welds.

“Get out! You understand me?” Some-

one asked with strong Arabian accent. Selina nodded and crawled out of the cage, her *metal restraints* heavily clanking. Stretching her legs after being folded together so long was painful. The hood was removed. Adjusting to the intense daylight of a tropical area was painful, too.

“You need toilet?” She nodded vigorously and an armed guard let her to a small toilet, where she could relieve herself in privacy. No one had cared or dared(?) to take any of her *fetters* off.

“Want some water?” Selina nodded.

“Then you’ve to obey – KNEEL.” She was not in a position to offer resistance, so a dried up Selina subsequently complied to every single order. The remains of her clothing were cut off. Her *restraints* except for the irreplaceable *bracelets* were exchanged by others, all polished *steel* and – to her chagrin – welded on. Her new jailers were well instructed and prepared.

Luckily they did not try to remove her foil-covered collar as well. Selina still did not know, if the latter contained an explosive charge, whose detonation would cost her her head quite literally. However they removed the metal foil wrapped around it. So they were definitely not aware, that it contained a tracking device.

If the latter could be detected on the other side of the world, was a question, only Kara could answer. Selina expected no benefit from the Kryptonian tracking her down, although even in Kara’s eyes she might have been qualified to argue, that she had been kidnapped and that the whole thing was definitely not her fault.

There was not much hope to escape otherwise either. These men were too well instructed, presumably by Harley Quin, what precautions were necessary to make sure that Gotham's Catwoman would stay in their custody and so far they had followed these instruction literally.

The only lock, which was not sealed by welds, was the one of 'her' new cage, but it had been replaced by a big hexagon screw, which required a flat wrench, which was so big, that it was impossible to hide. Her new accomodation was at least slightly larger than the previous one.

A big sign was affixed to it encrypted in English and Arabic by "Catwoman of Gotham City" – at least she believed, that the Arabic writing said the same. When her gag had been removed, Selina had had the impression her jaw was dislodged, but after a some time she could form words.

"I am NOT going to attend this cage," she had offered mild resistance, when she was ordered to enter the new cage. "I accept to be a captive, but I'm not a canary."

"Oh yes you be," had been the answer, "just without feathers." She had fought a great fight, a fight as good as a human girl could deliver with her limbs *fettered*. It had done her no good – she had ended up in the cage as intended, but for three days she had received neither food nor water.

"You answer, when you asked," the chief guard, who seemed to be the only one speaking English, had told her with a ball-gag in his hand. "No crying, no shouting. This go in else. You understand?" She had nodded. It was of no use

to dislodge her jaw and chew on an gag.

After three days of abstinence food and water were served to her in bowls like feeding a pussy cat. Someone had a faible to play her pranks. It took her some time getting used to the food, but the selection was sparse, at least it was no cat food.

In the following she was allowed a minimum of clothes – a full body harness like the one she had mocked Barbara about adorned her, emphasizing everything, but hiding nothing. A mask resembling her own covered her upper face, but everything else was clearly visible.

Only her very private parts were hidden from public view by a steel chastity device. Since she was *fettered* in a way that did not allow her to touch herself at all, this was merely a precaution against male guards taking advantage of her situation.

The most humiliating aspect of her captivity was, that she had to do her private business within her cage. There was a box, which was exchanged regularly. Selina was careful to keep the cage clean.

"You make mess, you live in it," the chief guard had declared, and she believed him. Her "home" was a kind of private zoo arranged under a huge glass roof.

This was used to keep the climate modest. Apart from this Selina was kept worse than the animals. She was not only kept in a cage of to small proportions, but constantly kept in her *shackles*. Anyone else might have become crazy from the pain of having her limbs forced permanently into these unnatural positions.

The weakly cleaning procedure con-

sisted of hosing her with cold water inside her small cage. Kara's punishment of imposing the *bracelets* on her, she still wore, was a picnic against this treatment.

There were other cages, but, as far she knew, she was the only human exhibit, all others were filled with real animals. Occasionally a peculiar group of women visited the zoo – presumably the harem of its owner, who had not shown up until now. From their talks she concluded, that he was a busy man jetting around the world.

Unfortunately she quickly became the main attraction of that zoo. The harem girls liked to visit the “Catwoman of Gotham”, a few of them even were even fond of teasing or hurting the helpless woman. But they provided also rumors, because some of them spoke in English.

From these talks of the English speaking harem woman, she learned, that she was a temporary exhibit. The Emir, her “owner” wanted to tame the Catwoman himself. She should be transformed into something western observers would have called a sex-slave, a woman without any own will subject to every perverted wishes of her owner. This was a fate worse than death to the proud Selina, and she seriously considered the latter alternative. But even that would not be easy.



It was night time, the only quite time for her. She was alone. Her narrow *shackles* denied almost every movement. Once again the forlorn woman thought about

possible ways to kill herself, to end a life, which was not worth living any more.

It would have been easier, if there would not be that little voice in the back of her head that told her. “Suicide's like giving up, a cat doesn't give up, never. It fights.” But how? The last bit of hope had waned. She could hardly move in those tight-fitting and welded on *shackles*, just sustain whatever these crooks did to her. Even if she could open her cage by some magic, they would make any pitiful attempt of flight ridiculously easy to prevent.

“Waiting for me, Kitty?” A deep and rough, but well-known voice whispered in clean English. She looked around in the darkness. Her powers might have been dwindling due to her lack of movement, but her eyes were still sharp and clear.

But right now she was in doubt about that. What had to be an illusion created by a secret wish, stood behind her cage. But this ghost was real, and it was no ghost, but a tall man wearing the famous bat-costume, feared by all villains and ached by the beaten down and now also by her. Well right now she was beaten down, too. She was not betrayed by her senses. It was the Dark Knight himself. A small bulb filled her cage with light.

“Batman, thank God. You are going to take me out of here?” She blushed. She had been forced to appear naked before several men and women during her services at the bondage bar and, since she had been incarcerated here. But appearing naked before him even in the dim light of a small bulb somehow mattered.

“That was my intention,” he replied dryly. Yet, these were by far the sweetest words, she could think of right now.

“I’ll go to prison and stay inside, if you demand this, but get me out of this cage,” she pleaded. She did not say “please”, but there was true despair in her voice, and her sad eyes told him more than words.

“This doesn’t sound like the Cat, I once knew,” he remarked, “but don’t worry. I didn’t come in order to put you into jail, or did you commit something in the meantime, I’m not aware of?” There was a mocking tone in the last question. Therefore she did not answer directly.

“I’ve been in hell!” She replied instead, “Batman, get me out of here, PLEASE. If you’ll do that for me, I swear that I won’t fight you anymore, whatever may happen.” She was clearly honest about this.

“Don’t lead me into temptation, Kitty,” he said. “Fighting you’s been one of the rare pleasures, I really enjoyed.” But he was already about to unscrew the door of “her” cage with the corresponding big flat wrench. Quickly she wriggled herself out, once its door was opened.

“Not so fast, we’ve time,” he said. She looked at him questioning, and he produced a well-known pencil-sized tool.

“Kneel down, Kitty. That’s a laser cutter.” Incidentally it was the same model, she had used to free herself from the *steel restraints*, Kara had imposed on her, some time ago. “The battery lasts only two minutes, but if you don’t move and we’re lucky, I might be able to disconnect the conventional *cuffs* on your limbs,” Bat-

man explained, what she knew very well.

“The *bracelets* and the collar are off limits. Kara...,” she tried to inform him.

“I know already,” he acknowledged. “Are those the same, you wore already on the Gotham welfare ball?” He asked, and she nodded, which was barely visible in the dark surrounding, but his senses were as good as hers. The blue beam slowly worked through the *chain* of her *leg-irons*.

“I’ll cut only the *chains*. Cutting the *manacles* is too dangerous,” he explained and she agreed by nodding. Then he repeated the same with ‘her’ elbow *cuffs*.

“Thanks,” she said and soon she had switched her joined hands to the front. Bravely she hid the pain caused by movements so long denied by the cruel set of *restraints*, which had kept her limbs imprisoned for so long, and raised herself.

“Let’s go?” She asked slightly puzzled, when he did not make an effort to move.

“Don’t get me wrong.” Since his masked face was in the shadow she could not see but only feel him smile, “I like, what I see, but we might cause less attention, if you could afford the time to dress.” With these words he reached her a small bundle, he had brought with him. The latter contained underwear, a tank top, a pair of hot-pants, sport shoes and a locally common burka to cover it all.

“Thanks,” she replied, “thank you very much.” She quickly dressed herself.

“You came well prepared,” she remarked, when she realized in passing, that everything fitted her very well. “Where did you get my measures from?”

“Good guess,” he gave back evasively, “after all I know you for some time.”

“And you really did not come with the intention to put me in jail?” Somehow this still deemed her too good to be true.

“Why should I operate the expense to put you in jail, if you are in one, even you couldn’t escape from?” He asked back.

“Then why did you come at all?” She asked. “I thought... well I thought, you hate me, maybe not really hate me, but... you know, were not sad, that I was gone.”

“Maybe I missed you,” he smiled and it was a warm smile, a smile that touched her heart. “Seriously, Kitty, we might have had our differences, but I DON’T hate you and I DON’T think, that you deserve, what these people did to you or were about to do to you,” he assured her. “My offer to help you, when we met last time was serious, although at that time I honestly thought, that you had only trouble to find a new job.” She wanted to interrupt him, but he raised his hand.

“Let me finish this. When we’re back in Gotham you WILL be my guest, as long as you want – I insist on it. What you’ll do afterwards, is up to you, although I hope seriously, we won’t depart as enemies.”

“You mean it honest?” It was not, that she distrusted him. It was more that she had considered to commit suicide a few minutes ago and still could not believe, that this was more than a day-dream.

“Boy scouts promise,” he indicated understanding for her actual confusion.

“How could I be your enemy after that?” This time it was a serious question.

“You don’t have to be, Kitty,” he said, and this time he was definitely serious, too. “It’s not written in stone, that the Bat and the Cat have to fight each other.”

“No, I guess it’s not.” In the following they did not share many words, but Selina had to think about, what he had said. Batman who carried the light took the lead and, while they followed endless empty hallways, Selina got the first impressions about the truly impressive place, where she had been held captive for so long.

The palace, which was only partially enlightened during the nights, was huge, and the zoo, in which she had served so far as a living exhibition, occupied only one of several inner courtyards all covered by flexible glass roofs, which allowed to control temperature and humidity according to its allmighty owner’s wishes.

Selina’s hands were still *chain*-linked, but this was not visible under the cover of the burka. Occasionally Batmann could sense a soft tinkle from this or the other *chains*, he had cut, but not removed. Apart from this the Cat’s moves were completely free of any treacherous noises. Batman secretly admired the grace of her movements, although this was continuously improving with every further move, which had been denied to her for so long.

He knew his business, too: They followed the route, he had chosen to penetrate the elaborate security system, backwards, and it worked fine. Batman had pretended to be one of the countless delivery men, who supplied the inhabitants of the palace around the clock with ev-

everything needed for living or pleasure or, whatever purpose they had ordered it for.

As such he had arrived in a small pickup truck parked in an overcrowded parking space sufficient for a football stadium. He quickly switched into civil clothes, after they had entered this truck.

"So I'm witnessing of the unmasking of, Batman," she remarked mockingly.

"You know damned well, that I'm Bruce Wayne, as well as I know, who you are," he replied. "Don't you, Miss Kyle?" She nodded with a smile. She had to hide under a plane, but the check on leave was not very strict. Obviously it had not been noticed yet, that Gotham's notorious Catwoman had escaped once again.

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When they were out of side, she joined him on the front seats, still worked over from her suffering, but relaxed and happy for the first time after weeks of captivity and physical as well as mental torture. The burka had been abandoned.

"Do you know, that I once considered you one of the biggest disappointments in my life?" She managed to surprise him with this question. He raised an eyebrow.

"I didn't know, that I've played a rôle in your life at all," he gave back dryly.

"Well, I was very young, when I received a scholarship, which allowed me to study in Harvard, a scholarship from the Wayne Foundation. The raising star in the engineering department at that time there was a boy from my hometown, a man named Bruce Wayne," she told him.

"I know that you've been in Harvard," was the surprised answer, "but I didn't know, that you've been in the engineering department, your official records..."

"... are intentionally not complete," she finished his sentence. "I didn't want everyone to know everything from me, but I've a degree in engineering, too."

"That explains your knowledge," he reflected. "I noticed, that your Catmobile had it's origin in an old Porsche, but also that the additions had to be designed by a first-class engineer, who has been you?"

"I couldn't afford to hire someone else," she said, "and I rebuited it, too. I would've liked to do more, but this hobby swallowed all my money for some time."

"Nevertheless it's a really nice car. When you were in Harvard, did you take the monster-course by Professor H.?"

"Yes, and I finished it with the highest rate, second only to you," she said proudly. "But I was still a beginner, when you were a senior. I don't think, that you recognized me at all, while I was there."

"Do you want to say, that you've been a little bit in love with me?" He asked.

"No, but I was, let's say impressed," she replied. There was a trace of blushing, and he smiled. "When I returned to Gotham, I considered to apply for a job at Wayne Enterprises. It was my dream."

"And?" He asked. "Don't tell, me that I've overlooked someone like you?"

"No, I didn't apply at all," she replied.

"Why not?" He looked in her eyes.

"Because I learned or for some time believed to have learned, that you had be-

come a playboy, a ruthless squanderer of your heritage, pure selfishness in person.”

“It was necessary to create such an image,” he explained, “up to now nobody has drawn a connection between Batman and the lavish billionaire – except you.”

“But it took me some time to find out,” she said. “In the mean time I hated you for being so ignorant, wasting your talent and stepping aside, while you could have done so much. It was unbelievable how a person so gifted could waste...”

“... his talents? I did a lot of things, some fitting into my profession, but also others,” he replied, “it deemed me not necessary for the public to know that.”

“When I learned, that it was you, who created Batman, my view of the world improved a lot,” she said. He looked at her.

“You were the freshman, who asked about using a magneto-hydrodynamic converter as an entry stage, when I defended my dissertation?” He asked apparently out of context. Her eyes widened. Now he had managed to surprise her.

“You remember this?” She asked.

“Of course,” he replied. “The correspondingly improved design’s been completed, a year ago. It was hard work, but I consider the result worth the effort. I can show you the prototype, when we’re back – if you’re still interested, of course?”

“Of course, I insist on it,” she said, “I mean, that would be nice. – However, how will we get through the security gates at the airport? I still can’t take these off,” she remarked indicating ‘her’ *bracelets*.

“We simply won’t go through them,”

he replied, “I have the privilege to own a private Jet, and in Arabian countries an appropriate amount of baksheesh does wonders for those, who can afford it.”

“And at home in America?” She asked doubtfully. “The aeronautical authorities in the States have different standards.”

“What the US Customs and Air Force don’t know, doesn’t attract their attention,” he assured her. “There’s a small corridor not covered by radar very well. A small stealthy plane like this can slip through without being noticed. Don’t mention this to an Air force general.”

“You invested a lot of money in order to bring me back,” she stated the obvious. “I would like to, but I can’t afford to pay back even a fraction of your expenses.”

“That’s not your concern. I regard this as a... let’s say as a cultural donation,” he replied, “Gotham City wouldn’t be the same without its wonderful Catwoman.”

The interior of Bruce Wayne’s plane, they reached unharmed, did not show the luxury expected from a billionaire’s business jet, but it was well equipped with tools, weapons and other useful things, one would not expect there. With the help of the latter and Batman’s assistance Selina got finally rid of her *ankle* and *elbow manacles*. Only Aphrodite’s *bracelets* and Kara’s collar remained off limits.

Batman expressed his doubts, that the collar was charged with an explosive. He was aware about the unique properties of Kryptonian super metal, but assured her, that her collar could be dealt with in Gotham if necessary. The *wristlets* on the

other hand posed a big mystery even for him and raised his scientific interest.

“So these *bracelets* are the same, you’ve worn on the Gotham charity ball already,” he remarked admiring the spotless surface “and you’ve not been able to take them off since.” It was not a question, but she shook her head anyway.

“You REALLY didn’t know?” She asked.

“No, Kara and Barbara had not inducted me to, what they had done to you. I was just wondering, why you had chosen a kind of *handcuffs* as a part of your masquerade. This was by no means typical for you. Kara told me the full story only, after she had revealed to me, that you had been kidnapped. This was two days ago.”

“Well, somehow this was always what you wanted to do to me,” she stretched the *chain* joining the irremovable *circlets* on her wrists to its narrow limit. She was teasing him with her pretended helplessness, and this time she did it on purpose.

“But I never managed to do so,” he admitted, “at least not for long. In this respect I’ve to admit defeat to ancient Hephaestus, because his *‘cat-bracelets’* achieved what my *bat-cuffs* never could, hold you captive. Nevertheless, I can at least offer my help in trying to free you from those.”

“I think, you understand, I don’t share your admiration for Hephaestus,” she replied, “but in this aspect every help’s appreciated. I’m at my wits end here.”

“Don’t bet too much on it. I honestly think, you’re a better lock-picker than me,” he admitted. “But maybe my approach is by chance more promising?”

“I may be ambitious, but in this particular case I’d be the last, who’d be unhappy, when you should succeed, where I failed,” she admitted pragmatically.

“Give me your hands then,” he requested and produced a lock-pick out of his utility belt. “It may take some time.”

“Go ahead,” she encouraged him, “any fresh idea, how I could get rid of these *‘bracelets’* will be welcome.” He began to work on the locks, first on the left than on the right *bracelet*, but although he took his time and successively applied all his tricks, the click, she longed for, with which at least one of the *circlets* would pop open and release her wrist, did not sound.

“Somehow this pick doesn’t proceed beyond a certain point,” he finally stated seeking for an explanation, “although the key must pass it in order to be properly inserted.” She nodded knowingly.

“When I used the proper key, the one Supergirl has hidden somewhere, I had always the impression, that it underwent a complicated deformation, once inserted into its hole, something you cannot do with a lock pick, independently, how sophisticated the latter may be crafted.”

“Maybe it’s just a part of the locking mechanism, that behaves strangely,” he suggested, but she shook her head.

“No, I’m sure, it’s the key, which deforms itself somehow,” she replied, “but only if it is inserted in its hole. This doesn’t exclude, that a part of the locking mechanism also deforms itself. However, in practical terms it would be impossible to copy such a behavior with any pick.”

“Ordinary matter may undergo a phase transition or show a memory-effect, but, as far as I know, these effects do not depend on the shape of the external surroundings,” he remarked, citing common scientific knowledge. She nodded.

“This material – I think it’s called *Adamant* – isn’t ordinary matter at all, neither a metal nor something else,” she said. “It’s more like a frozen force field. Don’t ask me, what it is or how someone could have produced it, but it is, what it is.”

“So you don’t think, it’s just another kind of super metal?” She shook her head.

“All metals, even Kryptonian super metal have a crystal structure, which is visible in X-rays, and they are good conductors, while this stuff is completely structureless in X-rays and at least was a very good insulator, although it glitters now – I’m shure, I would be dead if not.”

“You mean the recent ‘incident’ with Mabuse?” This conclusion was obvious.

“Yes,” she replied, “for a second or so it absorbed enough energy to run most of the city, industry included. A tiny fraction of this would have been sufficient to fry me like a grill chicken. After that the ‘bracelets’ sparkled like polished silver, before they’ve been black, darker than coal. It’s of course just a a vague hypothesis of mine, but I think, they were somehow loaded up, which in turn means, that this *fetter* is now even stronger, possibly much stronger, than it has been before.”

“Maybe it’s really no matter, but a kind of topological knot in space-time, and the sparkling surface is a tiny superconducting barrier layer,” he mused, “of

course I don’t know how to create something alike, but maybe Hephaestus did?”

“That’s also an interesting idea, but not a theory,” she replied professionally.

“No, of course not,” he admitted. Then he looked into her brown eyes. “But seriously, Kitty, you should have asked me, before approaching Mabuse.”

“Would you’ve been able to free me from those?” She asked, twisting them.

“Most likely not,” he admitted, “but I’d have negotiated with Kara on your behalf. It’s no fault to ask for help, even if one’s to defend a formidable reputation.”

“I thought, you’d have laughed about me,” she explained, “a cropped cat, that’s, what I’m, is like a tiger without teeth.”

“I admit, that I’d have considered it a valuable information, that these, let’s call them ‘*cat-bracelets*’, could actually hold you, after all no *bat-cuff* ever managed to do so,” he said. “But I’d not have laughed at you, and I also wouldn’t have left you in the lurch. After all I still owe you something, e.g. from the Whiteman-case.”

“Maybe, I should have asked you,” she admitted. “If I had done so, it would at least have spared us, that you had to rescue me out of an oriental zoo’s cage.”

“Maybe, it’s good that you’re what you’re,” he said with a smile, “because I wouldn’t like to have missed the latter either.” She did not answer, but the knowledge, that it had been important for him to rescue her, was not really unpleasant.

With the plane on autopilot, they bot got a handful of sleep during the flight.

Chapter 12

A new Beginning

They arrived in Gotham the next evening, and he insisted to celebrate the Cat's return with a candle-light dinner in his mansion above the city with delicious Madeira wine and a lunch, that would have made the cook of Gotham's finest restaurant envious. It was a starry night, and she felt like walking on the moon.

In the next morning she awoke in a soft bed from a gentle knocking at the door of a foreign bedroom. She was wearing no more than a white nightgown, she could not remember at all, and 'her' faithful *bracelets*. There was a bongo band playing inside her head. She remembered the taste of a deliciously sweet wine – the probable cause of her headache – and a kiss, a kiss she still smelled on her lips. The question was: Had there been more?

"Miss Kyle, Mr. Wayne awaits you for breakfast in half an hour," the voice of Bruce Wayne's fairly old servant announced. "Are you in need of anything?"

"No, no Mr...?" She had attracted her long shapely legs and wrapped the soft

white sheets around her gorgeous body.

"Alfred, Miss Kyle, just Alfred."

"Sorry, Alfred, I... I don't remember, how I got here. Did... eh, did something happen, I should remember?" She asked. The old man laughed knowingly.

"No, Miss Kyle, I can assure you. Mr. Wayne carried you into this room – he insisted to do it himself – and laid you down here. Mrs. Sunderlee, the cook, who served you, took your clothes off and dressed you in a nightgown – after Mr. Wayne left, if that's, what concern's you."

"I am sorry about having caused you and Mrs. Sunderlee this trouble, Alfred."

"That was no trouble at all, Miss. I find, that it's time for Mr. Wayne to look for someone who takes care for him. I'm not getting younger." Selina blushed.

"That's more complicated..." she tried to explain. Alfred nodded friendly.

"It's always complicated with Mr. Wayne. Mr. Wayne said, that you've some trouble with those *bracelets*, you cannot remove? Shall I ask Mrs. Sunderlee to

help you getting dressed?” He asked.

“No that the least of my problems,” she refused any help. “But thanks.”

“As you wish, Miss Kyle. Breakfast will be served in the kitchen. It’s only for you and Mr. Wayne.” Selina gave ‘her’ *bracelets* the habitual tug, tried to slip them over her wrists by pressing the joining *chain* downwards with her feet – to no avail as usual. She did it carefully not to hurt her wrists, pretending it was worth a try.

She sighed – for the first time she was not angry after she did it – went to the bathroom, Mr. Wayne’s guest quarters amply provided for each guest, and switched into the clothes, Batman had also provided for her, a white tank top, a matching knee-long skirt, socks, no stockings and a pair of tennis shoes. Everything in the closet was well-chosen and fitted her measures. He had spent a lot of effort (and money) to make her stay comfortable. She felt guilty about that.

“Good morning, Mr. Wayne,” she greeted him, when she entered the formidable kitchen. It was a classical breakfast for two, although the table was much too large for feeling comfortable.

“Bruce, Selina, we agreed on using our forenames, yesterday,” Batman said, raised himself in one fluent move and lifted the other seat a little bit to allow her to sit down like an English dutchess.

“Sorry, good morning, Bruce,” she said and added a shy and simple “thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” he said formally.

“Is there something else, we agreed on?” She asked, admitting her lack of

memory. “Something I should know?”

“Nothing I’m aware of,” he replied, and she took a deep breath. He gave her a warm smile expressing understanding. “You’re not accustomed to alcohol?”

“Not really,” she admitted. “I’m sorry for causing you and Mrs. Sunderlee this trouble. I guess I was tipsy, and I’m ashamed, that I was not able to get into my bed.” She blushed and was ashamed about it, too. She wished, she could stay indifferent, but without the protection of the cat-mask she felt like a pubertal girl.

“It was no trouble, but a pleasure for me to carry you there,” he replied with a smile. “You’ve caused me trouble before.”

“I know,” she admitted, “and I regret it. I’m indebted for rescuing me from...”

“That was also a pleasure,” he interrupted her. “Don’t mention it. I was referring to the numerous times you fought me as the notorious Catwoman.”

“OH THAT..., well, you gave me hard times, too,” she confessed. “Nevertheless I’m indebted to you now and...”

“Selina,” he interrupted her again. “There’s an unwritten law among crusaders. Don’t mention something, which is a matter of course to a fellow-crusader.”

“But I’ve not been your fellow crusader,” she corrected him. “I fought you more often than I can remember. I was...”

“It doesn’t matter, what’s been between us before.” He said seriously. “You are a fellow crusader, now, aren’t you?”

“I guess, I should be,” she whispered.

“Good,” he said, as if these words had cleared everything, before he added, “I’ve

invited Barbara and Kara for lunch.”

“Batgirl and Supergirl?” Her relationship to those was naturally not the best, and the presence of the *chain-linked bracelets*, she could not remove, on her wrist and the potentially explosive collar on her throat were the best reminders.

“Yes,” he said, “it’s time that you settle your differences with Barbara, and I think it’s Kara, who’s still the keeper of the keys for ‘your’ collar and *bracelets*.”

“I deserve to wear them.” She whispered and those words surprised herself. She looked at him. “I couldn’t imagine, that I would say this – but, yes, it’s true.”

“But this jewelry’s very inconvenient. I can’t go out with you in public like this, and I think the *bracelets*’re not helpful for you either. We should do something about them, except if you like them...”

“No, I don’t like them – I hate them.”

“Then we should do our best to get them off your wrists,” he stated in an attempt to cheer her up. “I think, together we can convince Kara to take them off and that collar as well. It doesn’t suit you.”

“I’m not so sure, Kara will do so,” she expressed her doubts, “but if she would, that will put another debt on the list.”

“Selina, again, there are no debts between friends,” he said, “and that’s what we’re now,” he stated matter-of-factly.

After breakfast he showed her the mansion, including safety precautions, technical gadgets and secret installments. Selina was embarrassed by the huge amount of credit, he accounted her for.

She was in particular impressed by the

laboratories Batman had reserved for his private use and some of the products, he had designed. They spent a full hour in front of the compact atomic engine, they had talked about on the plane. Selina’s eyes glowed, when she saw it in action.

“It was entirely your idea to couple these converters this way,” he had said.

“Yes,” she had replied, “but it’s a different thing to propose something, which is quite obvious from an engineering point of view, than to realize it in a working machine under realistic conditions.”

“It mainly requires the resources of a big company like Wayne Enterprises.”

“And approximately half a dozen ground-breaking ideas to overcome the biggest problems,” she had remarked.

“Nevertheless, I’m pretty sure, that Wayne Enterprises could benefit a lot from hiring someone as capable as you,” he finally said. She did not answer and he led her back to the living quarters. However, one trivial question busied her.

“Is it true, that you created these special *bat-cuffs* without key holes in particular for restraining me?” she dared to ask.

“I’ve to confess it,” he replied truthfully. “Since you managed to pick every lock, I ever created in almost no time – occasionally you’ll have to show me, how you did it – I wrought my head, but only found this admittedly cheap – one may more correctly say – unfair solution.”

“And you planned to use them on me?”

“Yes,” he said, “but not anymore, I don’t think, I’ll need them, do I?” She looked into his eyes and shook her head.

“If you haven’t noticed, I’ve already a pair, I can’t escape from. – But seriously, you found something far stronger to bind me: Trust – trust, I don’t deserve.”

“We’ll find out, what you deserve, one way or another,” he replied equally serious. “But honestly, although I understand that they’re a nuisance to you, to me these fine *cat-bracelets* look very well on you.”

“You like to see me *shackled*?” She tugged angrily on the *chain* connecting her *wristlets*. He reacted to this flare of hot temper with a warm, disarming smile.

“Well, yes and no, but that was not the reason for my regret,” he replied expressing amusement about her reaction.

“What do you mean by ‘yes and no’?”

“Well ‘yes’ because I like to see you a little bit helpless, because I can help you and ‘no’, I don’t like to see you suffer,” he explained. “But if you weren’t wearing those *bracelets*, you wouldn’t be here today, and that’s, why I’ll always cease to regret, that Kara’s put them on you.”

“Sorry, I’ve never seen it that way,” her anger subsided as fast, as it had shown up.

“I know, that you’ve resigned from your job at Markham Inc. a few months ago,” he said conversationally. “Would you like to return to your old job?”

“It was not entirely voluntarily,” she said, “but it would have been a little bit difficult to explain those.” She raised her *chain-linked* hands. “Don’t ask me, what I’d to do to survive in the meantime.”

“Kara made some indications,” he said, “however, provided she takes those off, would you rather apply for your old

job, or are you open for something new?”

“It’s very unlikely, that my old position is still free,” she replied evasively.

“Oh, Emmet Finch would take you back with good grace,” he said, “but to be honest, I selfishly thought about seizing the opportunity with both hands and recruiting you for Wayne Enterprises.”

“You would really go so far, and hire the Cat as your secretary?” She asked.

“Not as my secretary, but as the assistant to the CEO and chief engineer with an appropriate salary. I shamelessly thought about a ^{24/7}-type commitment.”

“I can’t accept this offer,” she replied. “I don’t deserve it – you want to see more in me, than what’s actually there.”

“It’s a strictly professional offer,” he objected, “I know very well, what you’ve managed for Finch and Markham, and Wayne Enterprises can only benefit from your abilities. Besides I could need some help in engineering as well and, who finished Professor H.’s course with an ‘A+’, can’t have forgotten everything...”

“What, if Kara doesn’t take these off?”

“I’ll hire you anyway,” he blindsided her, “you can sign the papers tomorrow.”

“Hey, I didn’t say, ‘yes’,” she objected.

“You’ve asked, if I would hire you despite those *bracelets*,” he variegated her words, “and I said ‘yes’ I don’t care. Did I misinterpret something?” He grinned.

“Yes, you did, Mr. Wayne,” she insisted, but couldn’t hold back a smile.

“Bruce, Selina, we agreed on Bruce.”

“But, if I should work for you, – and I haven’t said ‘yes’ up to now, Sir – it would

be better..." she tried to act coyly.

"... to call me Bruce," he continued her sentence. "Look, Selina, this is not about us, this is strictly business. I know, that you'll get other offers, once you're back on the market. It's just the selfish attempt to misuse our acquaintance in order to recruit you first, before one of my competitors get's a chance to do so."

"And you won't accept a 'no'?" She asked, but her resistance was melting.

"Wayne Enterprises wouldn't be, what it is, if my parents and I wouldn't have successfully tried to hire the best and keep them on board by fair treatment."

"I might accept," she replied finally, "but I insist to earn my money honestly. If I won't meet your expectations..."

"I'm sure you will exceed them," he said, and Selina Kyle had a new job.



Kara and Barbara arrived at lunch time. Before Batman had asked Selina to step through her *cuffs*, which she did. Afterwards he fixed a leash onto her collar.

"Is that really necessary?" She asked him. "I will look like a slave-girl – your slave girl," she accused him mockingly.

"Trust me," he said. "Kara is a Kryptonian princess. It cannot do any harm to confront her with the degree of humbleness, she expects. Besides, don't tell her too much." He grinned. "She like's the thought that poor humans like us don't understand everything, she plans for us."

"Like pushing the two of us into each other's arms?" Selina asked and blushed.

"Among other things," the Dark Knight replied with a smile on his face.

"You looked through her simple stage managing as well?" It was no question.

"Of course," he said, tipping onto her nose, "and I could read in your face, that you had the same thought, when I took you out of that Arabian bird cage."

"She's manipulated us," Selina stated.

"No, she's tried to manipulate us, because she thought, she would do us a favor," Batman corrected her. "What she did not take into account was, that we both looked through her simple plot."

"But we've both also acted more or less according to her script," Selina objected. "She's tried to make us a match."

"Only because it was a good script, which worked for us, wasn't it?" A smile rushed over her face and she nodded.

"Occasionally we will tell her, that it was the two of us who've chosen each other much earlier," he said, "but not today. After all we want to get you out of those *bracelets*. That's why you should try to look a little bit like a tamed pussy cat. It might help to change Kara's mind."

"May I know, since when you did not consider me to be an enemy, Bruce?"

"I've never considered you an enemy, maybe a foe, but not an enemy," he replied emphasizing every word. "I've always admired your skills and your bravery, and I always thought, that it might be possible to tow you to our side."

"But you've tried seriously if not to kill me but to put me in jail," she insisted.

"That was before I realized, that you

only stole from people, who more or less agreeably deserved it, and that you never kept the stolen goods. More than a year ago I'd to learn, that the Wayne Foundation was not the only anonymous spender to the orphanage at the south side. After that, I did not believe, that the City jail was the right place for you."

"Why did you then insist to put those *bat-cuffs* on me, when I asked you for help in the Whiteman-case?" She asked.

"I hope you can forgive me for that, Selina," he replied admitting guilt. "I simply couldn't resist. You looked... well, incredible with them. But since you mention the Whiteman-case. I haven't told anyone about your participation. May I at least tell Kara and Barbara about it? It might be considerably helpful to argue..."

"No," she replied firmly, "that's our little secret, and it shall remain this way."

"As you wish," he replied, "but may I also know, how long exactly, you know, that Batman and I are the same person?"

"Also since almost a year ago: I had heard rumors that some remarkable things had been developed in the laboratories of Wayne Enterprises. I went there, let's say, out of curiosity, and I was impressed. I found some remarkable equipment, and there was the Batmobile – the rest was not difficult to conclude."

"Mr. Fox found out, that we had an unauthorized 'visitor' about that time, but we didn't have an idea, who it was."

"Do you want these gadgets back?" She asked. "They are indeed very useful."

"No," he said, "keep them as part

of your working equipment. Occasionally I'll show you some more. Maybe there's something, you don't know already."

When the two invited heroines arrived, Bruce Wayne handled Kara Selina's leash right after the formal greetings.

"You know Selina?" He asked. Kara gave him a disturbed look. Kryptonians were not used to rhetoric questions.

"Of course," she stated. "what did she commit in the meantime?" She took what looked like a light hold on her leash. From experience Selina knew that this was a delusion. Not even an elephant would be able to tear that *chain* out of Kara's hand.

"Nothing, that was not honorable," the Dark Knight replied. "Selina's suffered a lot, and I would be glad, if the two of you could settle your little differences in private from woman to woman, before we'll have lunch – you know the garden."

"Well, Kitty-Cat. It seems you've twisted Batman around your little finger. Don't expect that this'll be so easy with me," Kara said and led Selina on her leash away. In the mean time Bruce Wayne addressed Barbara, who seemed to be upset.

"You are surprised to find Selina here?" He asked, bypassing the small-talk.

"Well, I expected you to put her in jail, where she belongs, if you got your hands on her, not to keep her as your pet," she said acidly. "What changed your mind?"

"She does not belong in jail – you know this very well, and she's not my pet either," he stated affirmatively. "She will be my guest, as long as she wishes to be, and I expect you to treat her as such."

“She’s a notorious thief and liar. I know from experience, that she can make a certain impression on men, but you...”

“I have not been seduced by her,” he interrupted her speech. “I freed her out of a cage in an Arabian palace, where she was treated more or less like an animal.”

“I guess, she made a very shattered look and, that it was Kara, who gave you the hint, that a poor damsel in distress had to be rescued,” Barbara replied tauntingly. He did not react. “Bruce, I can understand, why you freed her from there, but you must not put her back on the streets. She deserves those *bracelets* and with that Kryptonian tracking collar...”

“No, she deserves neither the *handcuff-bracelets* nor the tracking collar,” he insisted. “You two went over the edge.”

“Kara wanted her to wear those *bracelets* only for a limited time, which she deserves very well,” Barbara justified their action, “and the tracking collar...”

“Barbara,” he interrupted her. “These *restraints* destroy her personality. Selina’s a human being as you and me, and you know as well as me, that she’s not killed anybody, who was not about to kill her.”

“But she’s a thief and a nuisance,” Barbara argued, “who always confronts us, when we don’t need it. To keep her...”

“SHE’S ON OUR SIDE NOW!” Bruce Wayne interrupted her matter of factly.

“WHAT?” Barbara exclaimed in fury. “YOU REALLY bought THIS from HER?”

“I trust her, and I require you and Robin to treat her as a full member of the team. She’s a valuable enforcement of our

capabilities.” Barbara was speechless.

“Are you sleeping with her?” She asked after a while with tart in her voice.

“No, I haven’t done so,” he replied harshly. “But, if the two of us should some day decide to do so, we won’t ask you.”

“I didn’t know, that you prefer criminals,” Barbara retorted bitterly. Was she deeply upset, or was she just jealous?

“She’s no criminal,” he declared, “well maybe by the letters of the law, but ethically she’s not. However our relationship may develop or not is not your business.”

“May I ask, since when have you been in love with her?” She asked wearily.

“Since the first time I met her,” he admitted. “And when she did not shoot me in the back, although she was in a position to do so easily, I was sure that she actually deserved it. But that’s something, I want to tell her myself in the near future.”

Kara and Selina came back. Selina had her head bowed. Kara had unclasped the leash, but she was still wearing the *chain-linked wristlets* and the collar, although she had switched her hands to the front.

“Problems?” Bruce asked and Selina shook her head. She was visibly disappointed, but refused to say a word.

“Kara, may I have a talk with you under four eyes? You two know each other,” he continued, referring to Barbara and Selina. “Maybe you can excuse us for five minutes.” He took Kara by an arm and they disappeared. Selina and Barbara said quietly next to each other on the table.

“Barbara, I know we have not exactly been friends...” Selina finally began.

“And we won’t be soon,” Barbara replied, “Batman’s insisted to accept you as a new member of the team, but you still have to earn my trust, before I’ll bet my life on you as my backup in combat.”

“That’s fine with me, I can only promise you to do, what will be expected from me. Although right now, I can hardly serve as a backup to anyone.” She indicated her still present *wrist restraints*.

“Actually I find, that these *cat-bracelets* suit you very well,” Barbara said, “they’re quite exquisite and this little *chain* gives them a personal note. They make a fine and fashionable addition to your catsuit.”

“And that harness of yours suited you very well, too,” Selina snapped back, “are you wearing it under your bat-cape?”

“Well, it is actually reserved...” She could not finish her sentence. Batman and Supergirl returned from their equally short, but more fruitful conversation.

“Bruce has convinced me, to let you off the hook,” Kara addressed Selina, “so let me take that of your throat.” She produced a tiny, foreign looking device and pressed it onto Selina’s collar, which opened immediately. Kara put the device onto the table. Selina caught her eyes.

“Was it charged with an explosive?” She asked; it was more than a question.

“No, that was a lie I invented spontaneously in order to deter you from working on it,” Kara replied. “I am sorry for this. – You know, that we can’t track you anymore from now on?” Selina nodded.

“Now to the *bracelets*. Give me your wrists.” Selina complied, and Kara opened them with the unique little safety

key. Catwoman resisted the temptation to rob her wrists and remained quite.

“These go back to Diana,” Kara said, “since they somehow act as a key to paradise island, I think they belong to the Amazons or does someone here claim them?” Everyone including Selina shook his head. She addressed her directly.

“You know, that this was a gesture of trust and faith in your promise to fight for the law from now on?” Kara declared portentously, and Selina nodded seriously.

“Yes, your highness,” she answered formally, although there was a mocking undertone, she could not suppress.

“You may call me, Kara,” the Kryptonian said. “After all Bruce says, we’re on the same side now,” she stated only to weaken the ascertainment immediately, “that’s at least, what most of us hope.”

“Thank you, Kara,” Selina said, and this time it was really serious. “Thanks for the faith you put in me in advance. I’ll try my best in order not to disappoint you.”

“It’s Bruce, who vouched for you. I owe him personally too much, so that my honor request not to ignore this,” she replied. “I can only hope, Selina Kyle, that you deserve his trust and support.”

“Enough of that,” Bruce Wayne finished the discussion. “We’ve to talk about some recent developments.” The rest of their talk was concerned with Gotham’s crime scene. Selina took active part in it and, although she had been away for some time, it was her, who could provide the most valuable portions of information.

Epilogue: New Frontiers

Three month later...

“You’re ready and willing to do this for Themyscira?” Wonder Woman asked.

“Only if you can’t find someone else,” Selina replied, “and, if you approve now and here, that we are even afterwards.”

“Approved,” Diana smiled, and removed “Aphrodite’s *Bracelets*” from one of her pocket. “Give me your hands, Cat.”

“What?” Selina was angry about Diana’s rush. “I know, what’s requested. But you don’t want to put them on me now?”

“Why not?” Diana asked, “it’s better, when you teach yourself some practice.”

“As you know, I had a few month of practice,” she replied, “Why don’t you get your *bracelets* be welded together first?”

“That can only be done on Elysium,” she said, “after all it’s no normal metal, it’s Femininium. Give me your hands. It’s not a big deal.” Reluctantly Selina proffered her wrists and each of the well-known to be inescapable *circlets* closed around them with the characteristic distinct click of finality, when Diana turned the key.

“Ready?” Selina looked at the *bracelets* with disgust, shook them and gave the *chain* linking them the old habitual tug.

“We’ve introduced us,” she said, referring to the *Adamant bracelets* that had once more taken control about her hands.

Diana’s home the island of Themyscira was in Danger. An important piece of technology, the ‘Gem of Thalia’ had been stolen. As far as Selina understood, this was a device emanating from the technology of the Gods, that controlled the energy flow necessary to stabilize Themyscira outside the space-time continuum of the detectable universe.

If it could not be restored or replaced, the island would be destroyed within two weeks. Fortunately a week on Themyscira meant a month on earth. However, no one knew what it meant on Elysium, the island of the ancient heroes, where even some of the Gods sometimes resided, and the only known place in the universe, where a replacement could be acquired or, where – this was a suspicion of Diana – the original had been brought to.

In order to compensate for the powers granted to the Amazons by Aphrodite, Zeus had ordered that no Amazon or woman was allowed to set her food on Elysium unfettered. Elysium was a refugium of legendary warriors, a danger

ous place ruled by the mighty Hercules.

On Aphrodite's request and mediation by Zeus, Ares the God of war, who was the patron of Elysium, had granted the visit of two Amazons, alternatively humans, but not Kryptonians. Since none of Diana's sisters had volunteered to accompany her and Barbara Gordon was occupied otherwise, Diana had asked Selina to support her in the attempt to retrieve the 'Gem of Thalia' or obtain a replacement for it, and she had agreed.

"I guess you want to say goodbye to Batman?" Diana asked with a twinkle.

"That would be fine." She followed the super-heroine along the by now well-known path to Bruce Wayne's office.

"High Diana, high darling," he raised an eyebrow, but did not comment on the well-known *bracelets* on her wrists.

"We're ready for takeoff," Diana declared, "Kara told me, that you two probably can't dispense with a long good bye?"

"You can bet on it," Batman replied, "can you give us five minutes – in privacy?" Diana nodded and left them alone.

"You know, that you don't have to do it, darling?" He asked her seriously.

"It would be a little late to back off, now," she said raising 'her' *chain*-linked *Adamant bracelets*, "they're locked already."

"Seriously, Selina," he said, "that's a dangerous mission and no one here can support you, if you should be in trouble."

"I'm serious, darling," she replied, "It's to be done, and I wouldn't try to do it, if I had any doubt, that I couldn't handle it."

"Okay," he replied, "We had this discussion before, and I know, whom I mar-

ried. But you've to promise, that you'll be careful and won't take too much risk."

"I promise." She replied with a warm smile, and he took her in his arms and kissed her. She kissed him back. Since the *chain* of 'her' *bracelets* did not allow her to hug him, she simply grasped the collar of his shirt. It was a long and passionate kiss.

When he finally loosened the embrace, without letting her go, he said: "I'd like to hold you a little bit longer, darling, but I fear, that Hippolyte's daughter's impatient already." He left his arm on her shoulder accompanied her to the door and opened it. Diana waited on the floor.

"Come on, Pussy Cat, we've to rescue a world," she said to Selina. Then she addressed Batman: "Take care of this." With these words she tossed him the key to Catwoman's unbreakable *handcuffs*. He snatched them with his free hand.

"Hey," Selina protested and raised her hands, "what do we do in an emergency?"

"No chance, Cat," Diana replied, "my bracelets will be welded together and, if they find that key of yours with us, it will be confiscated and you won't see it again. If you want those off afterwards, it's better to leave it here." Selina looked at the *chain* linking the locked *circlets*. She stretched it. If she wanted or not, those would be her companions, until they would return, if they would return.

"I'll put it in a safe," Batman said. He waited, until Diana turned away, gave her another kiss on her cheek and whispered, so that only she could hear his words: "Don't forget your promise, darling."

THE END