

BREATHTAKING BONDAGE DISCOVERY!

What follows may be the most significant find in the whole history of bondage. We have here excerpts from a novel written in 1916, in England, where John Willie lived as an impressionable 14-year-old. It is our conclusion, arrived at after due and deliberate consideration, that the beautifully inexorable bondage of Mlle. Célie, the heroine of A. E. W. Mason's *At the Villa Rose*, that he was emotionally electrified by it and that the exquisite bondage sequence impressed his senses as extraordinarily beautiful and appealing.

In coming to your own conclusions as you ponder this suggested genesis of Willie's obsession with bondage, consider that the book was very popular in England in its day, particularly among young people. Consider also that it was easily available to young Willie, real name John Alexander Scott Coutts. Finally, keep in mind what you have already inferred of Willie's sensitivities and sexual inclinations from his own later words and pictures and consider how easily these particular sensitivities

**IT MAY HAVE
ALL BEGUN
WITH MASON**

**EVIDENCE THAT
THE WRITINGS OF
A. E. W. MASON
TRIGGERED JOHN
WILLIE'S LOVE OF
BONDAGE!**

might have been stirred by Mason's literate bondage description.

After having read the Mason passages and the letter we received from an English gentleman, whose theory this originally was, study the two John Willie photographs we have selected to support our theory that young Coutts was indeed psychologically overwhelmed by Célie's long bondage ordeal. Is not the heroine in Willie's photo at left bound *exactly* as the Célie in Mason's book? Are not her arms encased in gloves and then drawn tightly together and pinioned, both in the book and the photograph? Even the thumbs and little fingers are bound together, in the book and the picture. The one refinement added by Willie is the rope drawn tightly from the thumbs down to the rung of the chair.

Fine, but in that picture, Célie is not dressed or gagged as Mason depicts her in the book. *But she is in the other picture!* There is the hat, the ropes are bound around her skirt *exactly* as Mason describes, and there is the very thick gag *thickly* knotted behind her head.

That Willie's photos so closely match Mason's descriptions cannot possibly be mere coincidence!

We find it conclusive. There is no doubt in our minds that Willie read the book when he was young and vulnerable to sexual impression and that Mason's well-crafted words flooded into his psyche and filled him with wonderful passion and pleasure. Certainly, the book is well-written enough to titillate and make a lasting psychological impression.

Our English friend who contributed both the material and the theory has not to our knowledge seen the two photos we are using to support his theory, which is now ours also. When he does, he will be more convinced than ever that Mason's words, written 62 years ago, are the very ones which exploded into Willie's psyche and ingrained him forever with his overwhelming passion for bondage.

Before getting on with the excerpts and the letter, we offer this final chilling possibility; had Willie not chanced upon Mason's book, would he have found himself gripped in his odd obsession? Perhaps not, in which depressing case there would not have been the genetic "Sweet Gwendoline", whose success helped induce Irving Klaw to turn into the bondage photo business. Without the evolution of bondage interest which was caused by the impact of Klaw's and Willie's careers, there would not be a bondage culture today, at least not as we know it.

More likely, we would all be sitting around in theaters and in front of our television sets, privately pining for some rare bondage scene... as our *only* source of what would then be a more carefully-guarded and certainly less gratifying interest.

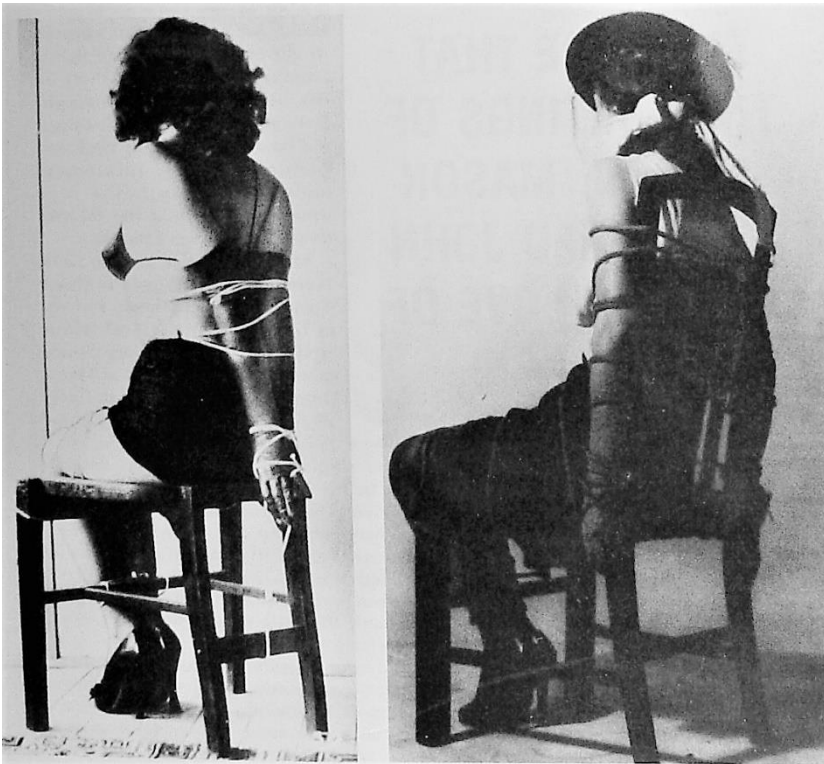
EXCERPT FROM THE LETTER

Here is a portion of the letter which arrived from England enclosed with the reproduced passages of the Mason book. Consider the perceptiveness of the writer, whose theory this is.

It's not often one finds a leading author who is one of us. But all the clues are here, it's a carefully-detailed description of a really skilled rope job, one of the longest bondage sequences I've ever read in a novel. The way she is bound and gagged, even her thumbs and fingers are tied. The way the rope bites through her stockings... the way the villains trick their helpless victim. There's absolutely *no* doubt that Mason was a bondage man! Indeed, some of the other Mason books, *The House of the Annew*, *The House in Lordship Square* and *They Wouldn't Be Chessmen* have useful bondage adventures involving the heroine, and several of the books I've not managed to find, they are all out of print.

This was first published in 1916, right in the middle of the Great War. Fascinating to reflect how this Gent from Victorian England got his knowledge of the very best way to bind and gag a wench, working up from childhood games, no doubt, like the rest of us. How many times, one wonders, did he practice this exact method on some tight-corseted gullible young beauty, a secretary perhaps, or some dewy-eyed young debutante whom he'd allowed to read the manuscript, 'Just to make sure it really does work – there- try to get free now, my dear. Now, let's try the gag!'. Such a wonderful ploy, he must have used it.

Fascinating, too, to remember that in 1916, John Willie, who was educated in England, was 14 years old. It's inconceivable that he would have missed it, what an effect it must have had on a young lad of our persuasion in those days! I can certainly remember the effect it had on me when I found it in our school library at the same age. I relished every stomach-churning word, and I had the Saturday-morning movie adventures of Lois Lane to satisfy my greed. This must have reduced young Coutts to a gibbering wreck!



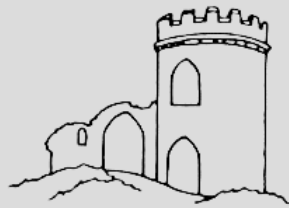
PHOTOS BY WILLIE

We offer these two black and white John Willie photographs as further evidence in support of our theory that Willie, as the young John Alexander Scott Coutts, was emotionally influenced by the bondage scene in A. E. W. Mason's *At the Villa Rose*, first published in 1916 when Coutts was 14 years old. Photo at left, in particular, is the exact situation in which Mlle. Célie, Mason's distressed heroine, finds herself. Consider the gloves she is wearing, the placement of the ropes, and the fact that even her thumbs and little fingers are bound together. In photo in the right, Willie has emphasized Mlle. Célie's hat and thickly-knotted gag and wardrobe, if not the exact placement of bondage on her arms and wrists. These poses are such exact pictorializations (sic) of Mason's text description that no theory other than Mason's probable influence on Willie is acceptable.

At the Villa Rose

By

A. E. W. MASON



ULVERSCROFT
Leicester

Excerpt

Published in 1950 (30th Impression) by Hodder & Stoughton, London.

But the amazing spectacle which kept him riveted was just in front of him. An old hag of a woman was sitting in a chair with her back toward them. She was mending with a big needle the holes in an old sack, and while she bent over her work, she crooned to herself some French song. Every now and then she raised her eyes, for in front of her under her charge, Mlle. Célie, the girl of whom Hanaud was in search, lay helpless upon a sofa. The train of her delicate green frock swept the floor. She was dressed as Hélène Vauquier had described. Her gloved hands were tightly bound behind her back, her feet were crossed so that she could not have stood, and her ankles were cruelly strapped together. Over her face and eyes, a piece of course sacking was stretched like a mask, and the ends were roughly sewn together at the back of her head. She lay so still that, but for the laboring of her bosom and a tremor which now and again shook her limbs, the watchers would have thought her dead. She made no struggle of resistance; she lay quiet and still. Once she writhed, but it was with the uneasiness of one in pain, and the moment she stirred the old woman's hand went out to a bright aluminum flask which stood on a little table at her side.

"Keep quiet, little one!" she ordered in a careless, chiding voice, and she rapped with the flask peremptorily upon the table. Immediately, as though the tapping had some strange message of terror for the girl's ear, she stiffened her whole body and lay rigid.

"I am not ready for you yet, little fool," said the old woman and she bent again to her work.

Ricardo's brain whirled. Here was the girl whom they had come to arrest, who had sprung from the salon with too much activity of youth across the stretch of grass, who had run so quickly and lightly across the pavement into this very house, so that she should not be seen. And now she was lying in her fine and delicate attire a captive, at the mercy of the very people who were her accomplices.

"And I shall be," said Adèle, "if..." she leaned forward in anxiety. She had come to the real necessity of Hélène Vauquier's plan. "If we abandon as quite laughable the cupboard door and the string across it; if, in a word, mademoiselle consents that we tie her hand and foot and fasten her securely in a chair. Such restraints are usual in the experiments of which I have read. Was there not a medium called Mlle. Cook who was secured in this way, and then remarkable things, which I could not believe, were supposed to have happened?"

"Certainly, I permit it," said Celia, with indifference; and Mme. Dauvray cried enthusiastically:

"Ah, you shall believe tonight in those wonderful things!"

Adèle Tacé leaned back. She drew a breath. It was a breath of relief

"Then we will buy the cord in Aix," she said.

"We have some, no doubt, in the house," said Mme. Dauvray.

Adèle shook her head and smiled.

"My dear Madame, you are dealing with a sceptic. I should not be content."

Celia shrugged her shoulders.

"Let us satisfy Mme. Rossignol," she said.

Celia, indeed, was not alarmed by this last precaution. For her it was a test less difficult than the light-colored rustling robe. She had appeared upon so many platforms, had experienced too often the bungling efforts of spectators called up from the audience, to be in any fear. There were very few knots from which her small hands and supple fingers had not learnt long since to extricate themselves. She was aware how much in all these matters the personal equation counted. Men who might, perhaps, have been able to tie knots from which she could not get free were always too uncomfortable and self-conscious, or too afraid of hurting her white arms and wrists, to do it. Women, on the other hand, who had no compunctions of that kind did not know how.

But Hélène did not hurry. The more irritable Mme. Dauvray became, the more impatient with Mlle. Célie, the less would Mlle. Célie dare to refuse the tests Adèle wished to impose upon her. But that was not all. She took a subtle and ironic pleasure tonight in decking out her victim's natural loveliness. Her face, her slender throat, her white shoulders, should look their prettiest, her grace of limb and figure would be more alluring than ever before. The same words, indeed, were running through both women's minds.

“For the last time,” said Celia to herself, thinking of these horrible séances, of which tonight should see the end.

“For the last time,” said Hélène Vauquier too. For the last time she laced the girl’s dress. There will be no more patient and careful service for Mlle. Célie after tonight. But she should have it and to spare tonight. She should be conscious that her beauty had never made so strong appeal; that she was never so fit for life as at the moment when the end had come. One thing Hélène regretted. She would have liked Celia, Celia, smiling at herself in the glass, to know suddenly what was in store for her! She saw in imagination the color die from the cheeks, the eyes stare wide with terror.

“Célie! Célie!”

Again, the impatient voice rang up the stairs as Hélène pinned the girl’s hat upon her fair head. Célie sprang up, took a quick step or two towards the door, and stopped in dismay. The swish of her long satin train must betray her. She caught up the dress and tried again. Even so, the rustle of it was heard.

“I shall have to be very careful. You will help me, Hélène?”

“Of course, mademoiselle. I will sit underneath the switch of the light in the salon. If Madame, your visitor, makes the experiment too difficult, I will find a way to help you,” said Hélène Vauquier, and as she spoke, she handed Celia a long pair of white gloves.

“I shall not want them,” said Celia.

“Mme. Dauvray ordered me to give them to you” replied Hélène.

Celia took them hurriedly, picked up a white scarf of tulle, and ran down the stairs. Hélène Vauquier listened at the door and heard Madame’s voice in feverish anger.

“We have been waiting for you, Célie. You have been an age.”

Hélène Vauquier laughed softly to herself, took out Celia’s white frock from the wardrobe, turned off the lights, and followed her down the hall. She placed the cloak just outside the door of the salon. Then she carefully turned out all lights in the hall and in the kitchen and went into the salon. The rest of the house was in darkness. This room was brightly lit; and it had been made ready.

Hélène Vauquier locked the door of the salon upon the inside and placed the key upon the mantle shelf, as she had always done whenever a séance had been held. The curtains had been loosened at the sides of the arched recess in front of the glass doors, ready to be drawn across. Inside the recess, against one of the pillars which supported the arch, a high stool without a back, taken from the hall, had been placed, and the back legs of the stool had been lashed with cord firmly to the pillar, so that it could not be moved. The round table had been put in position, with three chairs about it. Mme. Dauvray waited impatiently. Celia stood apparently unconcerned, apparently lost to all that was going on. Her eyes saw no one. Adèle looked up at Celia, and laughed maliciously.

“Mademoiselle, I see, is in the very mood to produce the most wonderful phenomena. But it will be better, I think, Madame,” she said, turning to Mme. Dauvray, “that Mlle. Célie should put on those gloves which I see she has thrown on a chair. It will be a little more difficult for mademoiselle to loosen these cords, should she wish to do so.”

The argument silenced Celia. If she refused this condition now, she would excite Mme. Dauvray to a terrible suspicion. She drew on her gloves ruefully and slowly, smoothed them over her elbows, and buttoned them. To free her hands with her fingers and wrists already hampered in gloves would not be so easy a task. But there was no escape. Adèle Rossignol was watching her with a satiric smile. Mme. Dauvray was urging her to be quick. Obeying a second order the girl raised her skirt and extended a slim foot in a pale-green silk stocking and a satin slipper to match. Adèle was content. Celia was wearing the shoes she was meant to wear. They were made upon the very same last as those which Celia had just kicked off upstairs. An almost imperceptible nod from Hélène Vauquier, moreover, assured her.

She took up a length of thin cord.

“Now, how are we to begin?” she said awkwardly, “I think I will ask you, mademoiselle, to put your hands behind you.”

Celia turned her back and crossed her wrists. She stood in her satin frock, with her white arms and shoulders bare, her slender throat supporting her small head with its heavy curls, her big hat, a picture of young grace and beauty. She would have had an easy task that night had there been men instead of women to put her to the test. But the women were intent upon their own ends. Mme. Dauvray, eager for the séance, Adèle Tacé and Hélène Vauquier for the climax of their plot.

Celia clenched her hands to make the muscles of her wrists rigid to resist the pressure of the cord. Adèle quietly unclasped them and placed them palm to palm. And at once Celia became uneasy. It was not merely the action, significant though it was of Adèle’s alertness

to thwart her, which troubled Celia. But she was extraordinarily receptive of impressions, extra-ordinarily quick to feel, from a touch, some dim sensation of the thought of the one who touched her. So, now the touch of Adèle's swift, strong, nervous hands caused her a queer, vague shock of discomfort. It was no more than that at the moment, but it was quite definite as that.

"Keep your hands so, please, mademoiselle," said Adèle, "your fingers loose."

And the next moment Celia winced and had to bite her lip to prevent a cry. The thin cord was wound twice about her wrists, drawn cruelly tight and then cunningly knotted. For one second Celia was thankful for her gloves; the next, more than ever she regretted that she wore them. It would have been difficult enough for her to free her hands now, even without them. And upon that a worse thing befell her.

"I beg mademoiselle's pardon if I hurt her," said Adèle.

And she tied the girls' thumbs and little fingers. To slacken the knots, she must have the use of her fingers, even though her gloves made them fumble. Now she had lost the use of them altogether. She began to feel that she was in master-hands. She was sure of it the next instant. For Adèle stood up, and passing a cord round the upper part of her arms, drew her elbows back. To bring any strength to help her in wriggling her hands free she must be able to raise her elbows. With them trussed in the small of her back she was robbed entirely of her strength. And all the time her strange uneasiness grew. She made a movement of revolt, and at once the cord was loosened.

"Mlle. Célie objects to my tests," said Adèle, with a laugh, to Mme. Dauvray. "And I do not wonder."

Celia saw upon the old woman's foolish and excited face a look of veritable consternation.

"Are you afraid, Célie?" she asked.

There was anger, there was menace in the voice, but above all these there was fear, fear that her illusions were to tumble about her. Celia heard that note and was quelled by it. This folly of belief, these séances, were the one touch of color in Mme. Dauvray's life. And it was just that instinctive need of color which had made her so easy to delude. How strong the need is, how seductive the proposal to supply it, Celia knew well. She knew it from the experience of her life when the Great Fortinbras was at the climax of his fortunes. She had travelled much amongst monotonous, drab towns without character or amusements. She had kept her eyes open. She had seen that it was from the denizens of the dull streets in these towns that the quack religious won their recruits. Mme. Dauvray's life had been a featureless sort of affair until these experiments had come to color it. Madame Dauvray must at any rate preserve the memory of that color.

"No," she said boldly, "I am not afraid," and after that she moved no more.

Her elbows were drawn firmly back and tightly bound. She was sure she could not free them. She glanced in despair at Hélène Vauquier, and then some glimmer of hope sprang up. For Hélène Vauquier gave her a look, a smile of reassurance. It was as if she said, "I will come to your help." Then, to make security still more sure, Adèle turned the girl about as unceremoniously as if she had been a doll, and passing a cord at the back of her arms, drew both ends round in front and knotted them at her waist.

"Now, Célie," said Adèle, with a vibration in her voice which Celia had not remarked before.

Excitement was gaining upon her, as upon Mme. Dauvray. Her face was flushed and shiny, her manner peremptory and quick. Celia's uneasiness grew into fear. She could have used the words which Hanaud spoke the next day in that very room, "There is something here which I do not understand." The touch of Adèle Tacé's hands communicated something to her, something which filled her with a vague alarm. She could not have formulated it if she would; she dared not if she could. She had but to stand and submit.

"Now," said Adèle.

She took the girl by the shoulders and set her in a clear space in the middle of the room, her back to the recess, her face to the mirror, where all could see her.

"Now, Célie," she had dropped the "Mlle." And the ironic suavity of her manner, "try to free yourself."

For a moment the girl's shoulders worked, her hands fluttered. But they remained helplessly bound.

"Ah, you will be content, Adèle, tonight," cried Mme. Dauvray eagerly.

But even in the midst of her eagerness, so thoroughly had she been prepared, there lingered a flavor of doubt, of suspicion. In Celia's mind there was still the one desperate resolve.

"I must succeed tonight," she said to herself, "I must!"

Adèle Rossignol knelt on the floor behind her. She gathered in carefully the girl's frock. Then she picked up the long train, wound it tightly round her limbs, pinioning and swathing them in the folds of satin, and secured the folds with a cord about the knees.

She stood up again.

With Hélène Vauquier to support her if she fell, Celia took a tiny shuffling step forward, feeling supremely ridiculous. No one, however, of her audience was inclined to laugh. To Mme. Dauvray the whole business was as serious as the most solemn ceremonial. Adèle was intent upon making her knots secure. Hélène Vauquier was the well-bred servant who knew her place. It was not for her to laugh at her young mistress, in however ludicrous a situation she might be.

"Now," said Adèle, "we will tie mademoiselle's ankles, and then we shall be ready for Mme. De Montespan."

The raillery in her voice had a note of savagery in it now. Celia's vague terror grew. She had a feeling that a beast was waking in the woman, and with it came a growing premonition of failure. Vainly she cried to herself, "I must not fail tonight." But she felt instinctively that there was a stronger personality than her own in that room, taming her, condemning her to failure, influencing the others.

She was placed in a chair. Adèle passed a cord round her ankles, and the mere touch of it, quickened Celia to a spasm of revolt. Her last little remnant of liberty was being taken from her. She raised herself, or rather would have raised herself. But Hélène with gentle hands held her in the chair, and whispered under her breath:

"Have no fear! Madame is watching."

Adèle looked fiercely up into the girl's face.

"Keep still, *hein, la petite!*" she cried. And the epithet, "little one" was a light to Celia. Till now, upon these occasions, with her black ceremonial dress, her air of aloofness, her vague eyes, and the dignity of her carriage, she had already produced some part of their effect before the séance had begun. She had been wont to sail into the room, distant, mystical. She had her audience already expectant of mysteries, prepared for marvels. Her work was already half done. But now of all that help she was deprived. She was no longer a person aloof, a prophetess, a seer of visions; she was simply a smartly-dressed girl of today, trussed up in a ridiculous and painful position, that was all. The dignity was gone. And the more she realized that, the more she was hindered from influencing her audience, the less able she was to concentrate her mind upon them, to will them to favor her. Mme. Dauvray's suspicions, she was sure, were still awake. She could not quell them. There was a stronger personality than hers at work in the room. The cord bit through her thin stocking into her ankles. She dared not complain. It was savagely tied. She made no remonstrance. And then Hélène Vauquier's arms, with her delicate frock ludicrously swathed and swaddled about her legs. But, again, of those who watched her no one smiled.

"We have had no such tests as these," Mme. Dauvray explained, half in fear, half in hope.

Adèle Rossignol looked the girl over and nodded her head with satisfaction. She had no animosity towards Celia; she had really no feeling of any kind for her or against her. Fortunately, she was unaware at this time that Harry Wethermill had been paying his court to her or it would have gone worse with Mlle. Célie before the night was out. Mlle. Célie was just a pawn in a very dangerous game which she happened to be playing, and she had succeeded in engineering her pawn into the desired condition of helplessness. She was content.

"Mademoiselle," she said, with a smile, "you wish me to believe. You have now your opportunity."

Opportunity! And she was helpless. She knew very well that she could never free herself from these cords without Hélène's help. She would fail, miserably and shamefully fail.

"It was Madame who wished you to believe," she stammered.

And Adèle Rossignol laughed suddenly, a short, loud, harsh laugh, which jarred upon the quiet of the room. It turned Celia's vague alarm into a definite terror. Some magnetic current brought her grave messages of fear. The air about her seemed to tingle with strange menaces. She looked at Adèle. Did they emanate from her? And her terror answered her, "Yes". She made her mistake in that. The strong personality in the room was not Adèle Rossignol, but Hélène Vauquier, who held her like a child in her arms. But she was definitely aware of danger, and too late aware of it. She struggled vainly. From her head to her feet she was powerless. She cried out hysterically to her patron:

"Madame! Madame! There is something, a presence here, someone who means to harm! I know it!"

And upon the old woman's face there came a look, not of alarm, but of extraordinary relief. The genuine, heartfelt cry restored her confidence in Celia.

"Someone, who means to harm!" she whispered, trembling with excitement.

“Ah, mademoiselle is already under control,” said Hélène, using the jargon which she had learnt from Celia’s lips.

Adèle Rossingnol grinned.

“Yes, *la petite* is under control,” she repeated, with a sneer; and all the elegance of her velvet gown was unable to hide her any longer from Celia’s knowledge. Her grin had betrayed her. She was of the dregs. But Hélène Vauquier whispered, “Keep still mademoiselle, I shall help you.”

Vauquier carried the girl into the recess and placed her upon the stool. With a long cord Adèle bound her by the arms and the waist to the pillar, and her ankles she fastened to the rung of the stool, so that they could not touch the ground.

“Thus, we shall be sure that when we hear rapping it will be the spirits, and not the heels, which rap,” she said. “Yes, I am contented now.” And she added, with a smile, “Célie may even have her scarf,” and picking up a white scarf of tulle which Celia had brought down with her, she placed it carelessly round her shoulders.

“Wait!” Hélène Vauquier whispered in Celia’s ear.

To the cord about Celia’s waist Adèle was fastening a longer line.

“I shall keep my foot on the other end of this,” she said, “when the lights are out, and I shall know then if our little one frees herself.”

The three women went out of the recess. And the next moment the heavy silk curtains swung across the opening, leaving Celia in darkness. Quickly and noiselessly the poor girl began to twist and work her hands. But she only bruised her wrists. This was to be the last of the séances. But it must succeed! So much of Mme. Dauvray’s happiness, so much of her own, hung upon its success. Let her fail tonight, she would be surely turned from the door. The story of her trickery and her exposure would run through Aix. And she had not told Harry! It would reach his ears from others. He would never forgive her. To face the old, difficult life of poverty and perhaps starvation again, and again alone, would be hard enough, but to face it with Harry Wethermill’s contempt added to its burdens, as the poor girl believed she surely would have to do, no, that would be impossible! Not this time would she turn away from the Seine because it was so terrible and cold. If she had had the courage to tell him yesterday, he would have forgiven, surely, he would! The tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. What would become of her now? She was in pain besides. The cords around her arms and ankles tortured her. And she feared, yes, desperately she feared the effect of the exposure upon Mme. Dauvray. She had been treated as a daughter, now she was in return to rob Mme. Dauvray of the belief which had become the passion of her life.

“Let us take our seats at the table,” she heard Mme. Dauvray say. “Hélène, you are by the switch of the electric light. Will you turn it off?” And upon that Hélène whispered, yet so that the whisper reached to Celia and awakened hope:

“Wait! I will see what she is doing.”

The curtains opened, and Hélène Vauquier slipped to the girl’s side.

Celia checked her tears. She smiled imploringly, gratefully.

“What shall I do?” asked Hélène, in a voice so low that the movement of her mouth rather than the words made the question clear.

Celia raised her head to answer. And then a thing incomprehensible to her happened. As she opened her lips Hélène Vauquier swiftly forced a handkerchief in between the girl’s teeth, and lifting the scarf from her shoulders wound it tightly twice across her mouth, binding her lips, and made it fast under her the brim of her hat behind her head. Celia tried to scream; she could not utter a sound. She stared at Hélène with incredulous, horror-stricken eyes. Hélène nodded at her with a cruel grin of satisfaction, and Celia realized, though she did not understand, something of the rancor and the hatred which seethed against her in the heart of the woman whom she had supplanted. Hélène Vauquier meant to expose her tonight; Celia had no doubt of it. That was her explanation of Hélène Vauquier’s treachery; and believing that error, she believed yet another, that she had reached the terrible climax of her troubles. She was only at the beginning of them.

“Hélène!” cried Mme. Dauvray sharply. “What are you doing?”

The maid instantly slid back into the room.

“Mademoiselle has not moved,” she said.

Celia heard the women settle in their chairs about the table.

“Is Madame ready?” asked Hélène, and then there was the sound of the snap of a switch. In the salon darkness had come.

If only she had not been wearing her gloves, Celia thought, she might possibly have just been able to free her fingers and her supple hands from their bonds. But as it was, she was helpless. She could only sit and wait until the audience in the salon grew tired of waiting and came to her. She closed her eyes, pondering if by any chance she could excuse her failure. But her heart sank within her as she thought of Mme. Rossignol's raillery. No, it was all over for her...

She opened her eyes, and she wondered. It seemed to her that there was more light in the recess than there had been when she closed them. Very likely her eyes were growing used to the darkness. Yet, yet, she ought not to be able to distinguish quite so clearly the white pillar opposite to her. She looked towards the glass doors and understood. The wooden shutters outside the doors were not quite closed. They had been carelessly left unbolted. A chink from lintel to floor let in a grey thread of light. Celia heard the women whispering in the salon, and turned her head to catch the words.

"Do you hear any sound?"

"No."

"Was that a hand which touched me?"

"No."

"We must wait."

And so, silence came again, and suddenly there was quite a rush of light into the recess. Celia was startled. She turned her head back again towards the window. The wooden door had swung a little more open. There was a wider chink to let the twilight of that starlit darkness through. And as she looked, the chink slowly broadened and broadened, the door swung slowly back on hinges which were strangely silent. Celia stared at the widening panel of grey light with a vague terror. It was strange that she could hear no whisper of wind in the garden. Why, oh, why was that latticed door opening so noiselessly? Almost she believed that the spirits after all... and suddenly the recess darkened again, and Celia sat with her heart leaping and shivering in her breast. There was something black against the glass doors, a man. He had appeared as silently as suddenly, as any apparition. He stood blocking out the light, pressing his face against the glass, peering into the room. For a moment the shock or horror stunned her. Then she tore frantically at the cords. All thought of failure, of exposure, of dismissal had fled from her. The three poor women, that was her thought, were sitting, unwarned, unsuspecting, defenseless in the pitch blackness of the salon. A few feet away a man, a thief, was peering in. They were waiting for strange things to happen in the darkness. Strange and terrible things would happen unless she could free herself, unless she could warn them.

And she could not. Her struggles were mere efforts to struggle, futile, a shiver from head to foot, and noiseless as a shiver. Adèle Rossignol had done her work well and thoroughly. Celia's arms, her waist, her ankles were pinioned; only the bandage over her mouth seemed to be loosening. Then upon horror, horror was added. The man touched the glass doors and they swung silently inwards. They, too, had been carelessly left unbolted. The man stepped without a sound over the sill into the room. And, as he stepped, fear for herself drove out for the moment from Celia's thoughts fear for the three women in the black room. If only he did not see her! She pressed herself against the pillar. He might overlook her, perhaps! His eyes would not be so accustomed to the darkness of the recess as hers. He might pass her unnoticed, if only he did not touch some fold of her dress.

And then, in the midst of her terror, she experienced so great a revulsion from despair to joy that a faintness came upon her, and she almost swooned. She saw who the intruder was. For when he stepped into the recess, he turned towards her, and the dim light struck upon him and showed her the contour of his face. It was her lover, Harry Wethermill. Why he had come at this hour, and in this strange way, she did not consider. Now she must attract his eyes, now her fear was lest he should not see her.

But he came at once straight towards her. He stood in front of her, looking into her eyes. But he uttered no cry. He made no movement of surprise. Celia did not understand it. His face was in the shadow now and she could not see it. Of course, he was stunned, amazed. But... but... he stood almost as if he had expected to find her there and just in that helpless attitude. It was absurd, of course, but he seemed to look upon her helplessness as nothing out of the ordinary way. And he raised no hand to set her free. A chill struck through her. But the next moment he did raise his hand and the blood flowed again in her heart. Of course, she was in the darkness. He had not seen her plight. Even now he was only beginning to be aware of it. For his hand touched the bandage over her mouth, tentatively. He felt for the knot under the broad brim of her hat at the back of her head. He found it. In a moment she would be free. She kept her head quite still and then, "why was he so long?" she asked herself. Oh, it was not possible! But her heart seemed to stop, and she knew that it was only possible, it was true; he was tightening the scarf, not loosening it. The folds bound her lips more securely. She felt the ends drawn close at the back of her head. In a frenzy she tried to shake her head free. But he held her face firmly and finished his work. He was wearing gloves, she noticed with horror, just as thieves do. Then his hands slid down her trembling arms and tested the cord about her wrists. There was something horribly deliberate about his movements. Celia, even at that moment, even with him, had the sensation which had possessed her in the salon. It was the personal equation on which she was used to rely. But neither Adèle nor this... this *stranger* was considering her as even a human being. She was a pawn in their game, and they used her, careless of her terror, her beauty, her pain. Then

he freed from her waist the long cord which ran beneath the curtain to Adèle Rossignol's foot. Celia's first thought was one of relief. He would jerk the cord unwittingly. They would come into the recess and see him. And then the real truth flashed in upon her blindingly. He had jerked the cord, but he had jerked it deliberately. He was already winding it up in a coil as it slid noiselessly across the polished floor beneath the curtains towards him. He had given a signal to Adèle Rossignol. All that woman's skepticism and precaution against trickery had been a mere blind, under cover of which she had been able to pack the girl away securely without arousing her suspicions. Hélène Vauquier was in the plot, too. The scarf at Celia's mouth was proof of that. As if to add proof to proof, she heard Adèle Rossignol speak in answer to the signal.

The two women stood and looked at her; and then Adèle Rossignol burst out laughing. Vauquier approached the girl, and Celia had a moment's hope that she meant to free her altogether, but she only loosed the cords which fixed her to the pillar and the high stool.

"Mademoiselle will pardon me for laughing," said Adèle Rossignol politely, "But it was mademoiselle who invited me to try my hand. And really, for so smart a young lady, mademoiselle does look ridiculous."

She lifted the girl up and carried her back writhing and struggling into the salon. The whole of the pretty room was within view, but in the embrasure of a window something lay dreadfully still and quiet. Celia held her head averted. But it was there, and though it was there, all the while the women joked and laughed, Adèle Rossignol feverishly, Hélène Vauquier with a real glee most horrible to see.

"I beg mademoiselle not to listen to what Adèle is saying," exclaimed Hélène. And she began to ape in a mincing, extravagant fashion the manner of a saleswoman in a shop. "Mademoiselle has never looked so ravishing. This style is the last word of fashion. It is what there is of most *chic*. Of course, mademoiselle understands that the costume is not intended for playing the piano. Nor, indeed, for the ballroom. It is a costume for a mood of quiet reflection. But I assure mademoiselle that for pretty young ladies who are the favorites of rich old women it is the style most recommended by the criminal classes."

All the woman's bitter rancor against Celia, hidden for months beneath a mask of humility, burst out and ran riot now. She went to Adèle Rossignol's help, and they flung the girl face downwards upon the sofa. Her face struck the cushion at one end, her feet the cushion at the other. The breath was struck out of her body. She lay with her bosom heaving.

Hélène Vauquier watched her for a moment with a grin, paying herself now for her respectful speeches and attendance.

"Yes, lie quietly and reflect, little fool!" she said savagely. "Were you wise to come here and interfere with Hélène Vauquier? Hadn't you better have stayed and danced in your rags at Montmartre? Are the smart frocks and the pretty hats and the good dinners worth the price? Ask yourself these questions, my dainty little friend!"

She drew up a chair to Celia's side and sat down upon it comfortably.

"I will tell you what we are going to do with you, Mlle. Célie. Adèle Rossignol and that kind gentlemen, M. Wethermill are going to take you away with them. You will be glad to go, won't you, dearie? For you love M. Wethermill, don't you? Oh, they won't keep you long enough for you to get tired of them. Do not fear! But you will not come back, Mlle. Célie. No, you have seen too much tonight. And everyone will think that Mlle. Célie helped to murder and rob her benefactress. They are certain to suspect someone, so, why not you, pretty one?"

Celia made no movement. She lay trying to believe that no crime had been committed, that that lifeless body did not lie against the wall. And then she heard in the room above a bed wheeled roughly from its place.

The two women heard it too, and looked at one another.

"He should look in the safe," said Vauquier. "Go and see what he is doing."

And Adèle Rossignol ran from the room.

As soon as she was gone Vauquier followed to the door, listened, closed it gently, and came back. She stooped down.

"Mlle. Célie," she said, in a smooth, silky voice, which terrified the girl more than her harsh tones, "there is just one little thing wrong in your appearance, one tiny little piece of bad taste, if mademoiselle will pardon a poor servant the expression. I did not mention it before Adèle Rossignol; she is so severe in her criticism, is she not? But since we are alone, I will presume to point out to mademoiselle that those diamond eardrops which I see peeping out under the scarf are a little ostentatious in your present predicament. They are a provocation to thieves. Will mademoiselle permit me to remove them?"

She caught her by the neck and lifted her up. She pushed the lace scarf up at the side of Celia's head. Celia began to struggle furiously, convulsively. She kicked and writhed, and a little tearing sound was heard. One of her shoe-buckles had caught in the thin silk covering of the cushion and slit it. Hélène Vauquier let her fall. She felt composedly in her pocket, and drew from it an aluminum flask, the same flask which Lemierre was afterward to snatch up in the bedroom in Geneva. Celia stared at her in dread. She saw the flask flashing in the light. She shrank from it. She wondered what new horror was to grip her. Hélène unscrewed the top and laughed pleasantly.

"Mlle. Célie is under control." She said. "We shall have to teach her that it is not polite in young ladies to kick." She pressed Celia down with a hand upon her back, and her voice changed. "Lie still," she commanded savagely. "Do you hear? Do you know what this is, Mlle. Célie?" And she held the flask toward the girl's face. "This is vitriol, my pretty one. Move, and I'll spoil those smooth white shoulders for you. How would you like that?"

Celia shuddered from head to foot, and, burying her face in the cushion, lay trembling. She would have begged for death upon her knees rather than suffer this horror. She felt Vauquier's fingers lingering with a dreadful caressing touch upon her shoulders and about her throat. She was within an ace of the torture, the disfigurement, and she knew it. She could not pray for mercy. She could only lie quite still, as she was bidden, trying to control the shuddering of her limbs and body.

"It would be a good lesson for Mlle. Célie," Hélène continued slowly. "I think that if Mlle. Célie will forgive the liberty I ought to inflict it. One little tilt of the flask and the satin of these pretty shoulders..."

She broke off suddenly and listened. Some sound heard outside had given Celia a respite, perhaps more than a respite. Hélène set the flask down upon the table. Her avarice had got the better of her hatred. She roughly plucked the earrings out of the girl's ears. She hid them quickly in the bosom of her dress with her eyes upon the door. She did not see a drop of blood gather upon the lobe of Celia's ear and fall into the cushion on which her face was pressed. She had hardly hidden them away before the door opened and Adèle Rossignol burst into the room.

He cautiously opened the latticed door of the window, listened for a moment, and ran silently down the drive. Adèle closed the door again, but she did not bolt it. She came back into the room; she looked at Celia, as she lay back upon the settee, with a long glance of indecision. And then to Celia's surprise, for she had given up all hope, the indecision in her eyes became pity. She suddenly ran across the room and knelt down before Celia. With quick and feverish hands, she untied the cord which fastened the train of her skirt about her knees.

At first Celia shrank away, fearing some new cruelty. But Adèle's voice came to her ears, speaking, and speaking with remorse.

"I can't endure it!" she whispered. "You are so young, too young to be killed."

The tears were rolling down Celia's cheeks. Her face was pitiful and beseeching.

"Don't look at me like that, for God's sake, child!" Adèle went on, and she chafed the girl's ankles for a moment.

"Can you stand?" she asked.

Celia nodded her head gratefully. After all, then, she was not to die. It seemed to her hardly possible. But before she could rise a subdued whirr of machinery penetrated into the room and the motor-car came slowly to the front of the villa.

"Keep still!" said Adèle hurriedly, and she placed herself in front of Celia.

Wethermill opened the wooden door, while Celia's heart raced in her bosom.

"I will go down and open the gate," he whispered. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Wethermill disappeared and this time he left the door open. Adèle helped Celia to her feet. For a moment she tottered; then she stood firm.

"Now run!" whispered Adèle. "Run, child, for your life!"

Celia did not stop to think whither she should run, or how she should escape from Wethermill's search. She could not ask that her lips and her hands might be freed. She had but a few seconds. She had one thought, to hide herself in the darkness of the garden. Celia fled across the room, sprang widely over the sill, ran, tripped over her skirt, steadied herself, and was swung off the ground by the arms of Harry Wethermill.

"There we are," he said, with his shrill wavering laugh. "I opened the gate before." And suddenly Celia hung inert in his arms.

The light went out in the salon. Adèle Rossignol, carrying Celia's cloak, stepped out at the side of the window.

"She has fainted," said Wethermill. "Wipe the mold off her shoes and off yours too, carefully. I don't want them to think this car has been out of the garage at all.

Adèle stooped and obeyed. Wethermill opened the door of the car and flung Celia into a seat. Adèle followed and took her seat opposite the girl. Wethermill stepped carefully again onto the grass, and with the toe of his shoe scraped up and ploughed the impressions which he and Adèle Rossignol had made on the ground, leaving those which Celia had made. He came back to the window.

"She has left her footmarks clear enough," he whispered. "There will be no doubt in the morning that she went of her own free will."

[End of Excerpt](#)

Originally published in BONDAGE LIFE No. 3, August 1978

Scanned and Transcribed by guardian46w, January 2019

Note: Are there two Adèles in the story? In the earlier part was Adèle Tacé and then later appeared Adèle Rossignol – guardian46w