

Charlotte's Niece

by Pamela

Chapter 8

A short time later, just as we were sitting down to eat, Lei came home. She was full of energy and anxious to tell Charlotte about the last minute preparations for her trip out West. She sat down at the dinner table and made no effort to help with serving. I saw Ethel signal me to carry in the serving plates and though I wanted to protest, I let it go; I was sure that Charlotte or Ethel would later ask her to help with the cleanup. Anyway, I could serve faster, so we could get done faster and then I'd be free to go up to Linda's.

When we had finished the main course, Charlotte, in her usual exalted position, droned on and on about something to do with her work day. How she could have so much to say was beyond my comprehension. I waited impatiently for her to signal Lei and I to clear the dishes. At a pause in the conversation, Charlotte said to Ethel and me, "so what's the dessert today? Something special?"

"Its your favorite lemon coconut cake, from Ebinger's," Ethel said.

"What's the special occasion?"

"I happen to know its Greg's favorite, also, so I thought it would be a nice idea!"

"Great!" I said. "God, do I love Ebinger's lemon coconut cake!"

Charlotte laughed, "well we finally agree on something! Now run along and clear the table!"

"But why can't Lei clear? It's her turn."

Lei turned her head at the mention of her name, "don't be a baby!"

"I'm not being a baby. Why should I do everything!"

"Ethel, would you listen to these two," Charlotte said. "Greg honey, you've been just marvelous in the kitchen this past week. Lei will help out in other ways. Besides, I have a question I need to ask her. Would you help now?"

"But, Charlotte!"

"Greg," Charlotte said, in a warning voice.

"Ethel, its not fair!"

Charlotte said, "Greg. I'm talking to Lei, and I would appreciate it if you could take care of the clearing? Okay?"

"At home, Lei and I always share the work!"

"Greg, I don't want to have to confine you to your room tonight," Charlotte said, with diminishing warmth in her voice.

"Hunh?" I said, "ground me?"

"You heard me, ground you."

I stared at her, "but.." I started to say.

Lei started to rise from her seat, "its OK, Charlotte, I really don't mind helping Greg."

"Sit down Lei" Charlotte said sharply, "Greg will do as I ask."

Her eyes were drilling into mine. "In one second you will stay home tonight and miss seeing your friends."

Ethel got up and nudged me, "Greg lets get these dishes cleared." Before Charlotte said anything more, I got up and took my dish in one hand and started toward the kitchen. Charlotte said, "you have a free hand, Greg."

I turned around and picked up Lei's plate and carried it to the kitchen. Ethel was busy putting the cake on a serving dish and pouring the coffee. I went back to the table and got Charlotte's plate. She was talking to Lei: "when you get back in the fall I'll take you there. They have the hippest clothes."

Mumbling under my breath I said, "boy that's an important conversation!"

Charlotte hesitated for a second and I worried that she may have heard me. But then she continued on.

The cake was a great treat and put me in a better mood. Instead of leaving it to chance, I said to Lei, "Lei, could you help wash the dishes tonight. I don't want to be late for going to Linda's."

Lei looked at me with some displeasure but then said, "oh, all right, Greg, I'll do some of the dishes!"

"Thanks!" I said enthusiastically, happy that my strategy had worked.

"That's the mature way to handle things." Charlotte said.

"Instead of ordering, ask!"

I wanted to say, "I thought I had asked before," but decided it best to take the small credit I was being given.

"What do you do at Linda's" Lei asked.

"We talk about things."

"What things?"

"I don't know, Lei. We just hang out. Its fun. She has some nice friends."

"Who all is there?"

"Audrey, who you saw, and Stephanie, Brenda and some others."

"Any guys?"

"Last time there wasn't any."

"Lucky you!" she said, and I blushed. "She and her friend are very pretty. Are they seeing anyone?"

"Linda sees this guy Mike, and Audrey has a boy friend Joe.

Mike's sort of a moron. I don't see why Linda dates him."

"Why do you say that? When did you meet him?"

"At the college the other day. When I was having lunch he was with Linda and Audrey. The idiot sort of made fun of me."

"Why?"

"I don't want to go into it, it was nothing."

"It doesn't sound like it was nothing. Tell us."

"If you're having a problem..." Charlotte started to say.

"It's nothing. He just called me pantyman," cause Linda had mentioned where she had met me, at the lingerie shop."

"Just cause you were in the lingerie shop, he called you that?"

Lei sounded puzzled.

"He was making a joke about me wearing panties. You see, Linda had explained a little of what went on there, and he was making a joke."

"Well it's nobody else's business that you prefer wearing panties," Charlotte intervened.

I winced at Charlotte's announcement, and hoped Lei wouldn't say anything.

"You're wearing panties?" Lei asked with slight surprise.

"Just plain ones," I said, "there's no fancy stuff on them."

"But didn't mom?" Lei started to say.

"Didn't mom what?," Charlotte said.

"My dad told my mom to tell Greg that he shouldn't wear the panties. It could be easily misinterpreted if for some reason, somebody saw him in them."

"Your dad is a comedian!" Charlotte said, laughing. "Anyway, Greg has been wearing the panties every day. Haven't you?"

"Yeah," I said haltingly.

"He prefers them, just like I knew he would. Don't you?"

Both Charlotte and Lei were looking at me severely, and I said, "yeah."

"Dad won't be happy hearing that!" Lei said.

"How's he going to hear about it?" I said.

"Lei, that's enough of that. Your father is not here, and even if he were, he would surely have no objection once he heard the whole story. I will be only too happy to discuss it with him upon his return." Charlotte was now looking straight at Lei with her lips curled into a slight smile.

"Sure Charlotte," Lei said. "I do think he'll have a lot of questions."

"Pshaw," Charlotte said, "its nothing more than comfort and practicality. Most people are just ignorant of it. Now, as for the pretty panties that Greg was wearing, I've already told him to keep away from my nieces clothes!"

"Charlotte!" I said.

"What's that? Greg!" Lei said surprised, "are you wearing the girly clothes!?"

"No!," I yelled and after seeing Charlotte quickly turn toward me, added, "just once. I was curious. I opened the dresser drawer and saw the panties and..."

"It seems that Greg is a bit tempted to play dress up in my nieces clothes. I'm sorry I doubted you about the bras, Lei, but Ethel and I will certainly try to be more vigilant. I doubt your dad and mom would approve of that sort of play."

"I'm not dressing up! It was like a one time thing, Lei!" Lei was looking at me distastefully.

"What would your friend Linda and the other girls think, Greg?"

"About what!"

"About wearing frilly panties. Is that why you protested so much about the girly bedroom? You were actually tempted by the clothes?"

"THAT'S A LIE!" I yelled. "CHARLOTTE'S NOT TELLING THE TRUTH!"

"There's no reason to get vitriolic!" Charlotte said in a soft almost motherly voice, "and we certainly will not yell in the apartment! All I know Greg is what I heard today. You were happy to wear the pretty panties. I hope you haven't been wearing anything else of my nieces. I don't think ill of you for having felt the need, but you should not have touched what doesn't belong to you. Lets hope that whatever emotion prompted you to try on the panties is gone."

"Like I said before, I'm never going to do it again!"

"Good. Of course, as Ethel and I made clear to you before, we could get you your own play clothes."

"I don't want play clothes."

"Greg, you don't want girls clothes, do you?" Lei said with what sounded like alarm.

"NO!"

"But Greg, honey..." Ethel said.

"What?" I said with annoyance.

"Like we agreed before, its OK if you want to feel pretty."

"I know, I know, I know!"

Lei was looking at me like I should explain, but I got up and started clearing the dessert plates. She turned to Ethel and said, "what's that about?"

"When I discovered that he'd worn Charlotte's nieces panties, I tried to find out why. It seems that he wanted to find out what it felt like to be pretty."

"Pretty!" Lei said as I came out of the kitchen. "Greg, do you want to be pretty?"

"No!" I said, but before I could continue, Charlotte said, "Greg, I think I was too hasty about not letting you show my niece's clothes to your girl friends. Why don't you get a panty and bra to show them? How about the panty you already wore, and the matching bra? How about that?"

"It's OK Charlotte, I changed my mind. I don't want to bring anything."

"No, Greg, I really don't mind. Go fetch a bra and panty."

"No, Charlotte. Its not necessary!" I could sense Lei staring at me.

"Go on, Greg, its really OK," Charlotte said. Afraid to escalate the situation, I went to my bedroom and took out the panty and bra from the dresser drawer and walked back to where Charlotte sat at the table.

"Here."

"OK, very nice. There's a fancy box in the hall closet, on the top shelf, go fetch it."

I walked to the closet and opened the sliding door. On the upper shelf I saw a shiny pink and white box which I reached up and took down, and then brought to Charlotte. She put the bra and panty in the box, after first wrapping them in pink tissue paper which was inside.

"Don't forget to bring it with you to show your friends!" Charlotte said, handing me the box. I saw that Ethel was smiling at me. I was afraid to look at Lei.

"I won't."

"It's almost 7:30, so you and Lei better get busy with the dishes!"

When it was just Lei and I washing and drying the dishes, she said to me, "Greg, I can't believe you're wearing panties! It's sick."

"Mom thought it was OK, didn't she?"

"She didn't want to hurt Charlotte's feelings. She agrees completely with dad that you shouldn't wear them."

"You don't know Charlotte. She has a way of making it seem like its OK. Sort of like the Mudd jeans."

"Well its not OK and you have to stop wearing them, or I'll have to tell mom and dad."

"OK, OK, I won't wear them anymore. Jesus, I'm going to get hell from Ethel."

"Just tell her your dad will be real pissed off. I'll finish the rest of the dishes. You change into your own underwear. OK?"

"OK, Lei."

"Greg."

"What?"

"Remember what I said to you before. If you have any trouble with Charlotte, you give mom and dad a call. They have lots of friends in Manhattan."

"You're scaring me Lei! What in the world could Charlotte do to me?"

"Well so far, she got you wearing girls panties! Next thing you know you'll be wearing skirts!"

"LEI!"

"I'm just teasing. I'm sure nothing will happen."

"I'm not worried at all," I said. "I'm sure I'm stronger than Charlotte."

"Jesus, Greg, are you expecting a fist fight?"

"No, I'm just playing around."

"Go change your underwear and go to your friends!"

"Bye," I said and went to do as she said.

In my room, I discovered that every last one of my jockey shorts was missing from my dresser drawer. Obviously Ethel had done it, probably under orders from Charlotte. I went to the living room to find out what had happened. Ethel and Charlotte were sitting there talking, and I came up to them.

"Ready to leave?" Charlotte said, "remember to be back by eleven."

I wanted to ask them about my underwear, but then decided it would only take time away from my visit to Linda's. Anyway, it would be better to ask Ethel in the morning without Charlotte around. I headed to the door, and Charlotte called after me, "don't forget your package."

I turned back and got it where it was sitting on the dining room table.

"Thanks. I'll see you at eleven."

"With Linda or someone escorting you!"

"Yes, Charlotte," I said wearily, and left the apartment.

I had second thoughts of showing up at Linda's with the bra and panty in a box. It seemed too weird to me. Like I was making it into a big deal. I thought of where I could hide the box in the building, perhaps in the incinerator room, or in the stairwell, but it was too risky. Oh well, I thought, the girls did ask me to bring something. Its not really my fault that Charlotte but it in a silly box.

Linda answered the door when I rang her doorbell.

"Greg, so great you could come!"

"Thanks! Its great to get away from those crazy women!"

"Are they giving you trouble?"

"Not anything I can't handle. Anyway, the good news is Charlotte says I can stay out till 11 tonight."

"Great!"

"But there's one catch."

"What's that?"

"She wants someone to escort me back to the apartment. Like it could be you. Do you mind?"

"I'll protect you!" Linda said in a heroic voice making us both laugh. "Come on in to the bedroom. What's in the box?"

I was about to reply when I noticed Mike coming toward me.

"Mike!" I said with a trace of annoyance.

"Hey, pant..." he started to say and cut it off after Linda gave him a vicious look, "Greg!"

"Hi," I said relieved that he wasn't going to tease me.

"Come join the party," Mike said, "you, me and Joe have all the babes to ourselves!"

I blushed and Linda said, "don't embarrass him, Mike!"

I followed the two of them into the bedroom, desperately wondering where I could hide the box. I held it in one hand partially behind my back. The room was more crowded than the last time. Joe was sitting in a chair and waved to me when I came in. I scooted into a seat on the floor next to Jenni and fumbled trying to put the box under the bed behind me. By a half an inch it didn't fit. Jenni, Jenny, Brenda and Stephanie called out greetings to me which I acknowledged. We were in a circle like the last time. Mike flopped on the sofa next to Linda and whispered something in her ear and she laughed. I heard Audrey tell Jenny about a CD she had just gotten.

Mike suddenly got up saying, "damn, I forgot my beer! Anybody want a beer?"

"Get me one," Jenny said.

"Greg?"

"No thanks."

Mike left to get the beers. While he was away the room grew silent. My box was between Jenni and me. "What ya got in the box?" she said.

"Its nothing."

"Nothing?" Jenni said.

"You know, from last time. I don't think this is a good day to show it." I tried using my eyes to indicate Joe.

Suddenly, Linda laughed. "Oh! You mean you got some of Charlotte's clothes!"

"Yeah, her nieces. But..."

"Aren't you going to show them to us?"

"Maybe later," I said.

Mike came back saying, "Sure you don't want a beer Greg?"

"No thanks."

"You don't drink?"

"I have to work tomorrow."

"With his brain, Mike, you wouldn't understand," Linda said.

Mike laughed. "What you got in your fancy box, Greg?"

I froze. "Nothing."

"Carrying around an empty box?"

"Come on, Greg, why did you bring a box with you? Show us!"

"Its got some clothes in it."

"You brought it down special. Come on show everyone."

"Its not of any interest to you."

Mike, took a long drink from his beer, and looked at me with amusement. "Let me guess what it could be. A cake? A hat? A soccer ball?"

"I said, its nothing of interest to you."

"Hey I'm insulted," Mike laughed, "I'm interested in everything the girls are interested in."

"Mike," Linda said, "cool it. Greg brought down some stuff of Charlotte's. It's her nieces stuff. We asked Greg to ask her for permission to show us her clothes."

"Hunh? What stuff?"

"Give me the box, Greg" Linda said and I obeyed her. She slid off the ribbon holding it closed and opened it up. She lifted aside the pink tissue paper exposing the bra and panties.

Mike started laughing. Some beer must have gone down the wrong pipe since he entered into a violent coughing fit. Linda held up the panties and the girls oohed and aahed at it.

"Oh, how precious," Jenny said, "let me see." She took the panties from Linda and ran her fingers over the rows of pretty lace. Linda held up the bra by its straps.

"Jesus, Greg, you're off the charts," Mike said regaining control of himself. "How the hell did you ever get involved with Charlotte's panties?"

Suddenly, Mike grabbed the bra from Linda's hand and held it up. "Great looking bra, Greg. I guess you're not the pantyman, but the braman." He was clowning around with it, and put it over his head.

"Mike, don't hurt it" I yelled, "its not mine."

With the bra held over his head, he took a swig of beer, "don't worry about your bra, Greg, its safe with me!"

"C'mon Mike," its not funny, I said with desperation.

"Mike, give him back the bra," Linda said.

"Charlotte will kill me if anything happens to it!" I said with alarm.

Mike started swinging the bra around like a lariat and then fished the panties out of Jenny's hand and started flinging it around with his other hand. I got up and tried to take it from him but he was too tall for me. Linda kept shouting at him to stop being so stupid, but he wasn't listening.

"Give him back the bra and panties," the girls were yelling at him.

"Give them back?" Mike said. Give braman back his bra and panties!"

"Fucker!" Linda said, really mad.

"Don't call me a fucker, fucker and a half." Mike said.

"Give him back the clothes!"

"Not until he begs me," Mike said meanly.

"C'mon Mike," I said with fear, "Charlotte is going to kill me if they get hurt."

"Beg me for your bra and panties."

"Don't be stupid and ridiculous," Audrey said.

"Beg!"

"I'm not begging!"

"MIKE!" Linda shouted. "Give him back the bra and panties or I'll never see you again!"

This appeared to have an effect on Mike, and he said, "I'm just playing around, Linny, you don't have to take it so hard."

"Can't you see your tormenting Greg? How can you be so dumb? He only brought the bra and panty cause we asked him to! Give them back to him!"

"OK, braman, here," and he flung the bra and panty so they hit me in the face.

Happy to have them back, I picked them up and looked them over. They clearly showed signs of Mike's abuse. There was a dirt smudge on the bra and the panties were wrinkled. Then I noticed a slight rip on the lace of the panties. "Oh, no, there's a rip in the panties!" I screamed.

"Come let me look," Linda said and I gave her the panties. "I've got some white thread, I'm sure I can make them look perfect."

"But they're wrinkled and dirty. Charlotte's going to kill me!"

"See what you've done Mike! What an asshole you are!"

"You've got the prettiest ass hole!" Mike said, laughing.

"Get out!" Linda yelled.

"Don't worry," Mike said, "we'll leave you girls alone. C'mon Joe." Joe got up and the two of them left.

As soon as they were gone, the girls set to work trying to fix up the panty and bra. Linda apologized a hundred times, and said that she would never invite Mike back to one of the meetings.

"Why do you date a guy like that?" I said.

"He's not all bad," Linda said, "he does have some good sides."

"Like what?"

"Well, I do like his energy, and he's quite strong. I like it when he holds me."

"He's also a great kisser!" Audrey said.

"Yeah, you wouldn't believe it but he's a knockout kisser."

"But what about talking to him?" I said.

"He's not always an idiot. Sometimes he's very sensitive. I don't know. I don't think he really intends to hurt your feelings, Greg. It's just that maybe he's trying to test you to see what kind of boy you are."

I found the discussion depressing. There was nothing about Mike that I liked. Linda could see my frustration and she came up to me and knelt in front of me. "Look at me Greg," she said, and I looked up into her pretty face.

She took my hands in hers and said, "I love the way you are so aware and sensitive, Greg. All of us, see you as so sweet. That you can wear Mudd's and panties and whatever. But you have to remember that girls like masculine boys too. We like how hard and I don't know, boyish they are. They sweat, have chest and leg hair. It's neat."

"So you don't find me attractive?" I said, fighting back tears.

"This isn't coming out the way I want," Linda said. "You're the kind of boy we can love, like one of us. I mean we can be a buddy with you. We can say anything we want, not like with Mike. Mike would have never gone with Charlotte, shopping for bras and panties. It would never have happened."

"So you all will be my buddies, but none of you would see me sexually."

"No, maybe one of us would see you like that. We don't know. But guys who really know they're guys, I mean act like guys, they create a sexual response. I guess its programmed into our heads as girls."

I was weeping slightly. The girls seemed concerned about me, and even very loving, but the words stung in some way I couldn't completely fathom. Audrey ran and got me a tissue and I blew my nose.

"I have an idea," Linda said. "This Saturday afternoon, we're all going shopping and maybe to the movies. Why don't you come with us? You'll have six girls all to yourself! Mike is definitely not coming!"

"Shopping for what?"

"Oh, anything and everything. You know girls!"

"OK, I'll come."

"Good, just be here at 1 o'clock."

"That should be fine. In the morning were taking my sister Lei to the airport, but I should definitely be back by then."

"Good!"

Linda escorted me home that night, with the panty and bra back in the box. Fortunately Charlotte had no interest in checking up on the condition of the clothes. Before I could get to my room she announced that seeing as the next night was Lei's last, would I please come back early from my studies to help Ethel prepare a special dinner in her honor. Somewhat sarcastically she asked if I had any objection to letting Lei enjoy the time without having to help with the setting up, serving or cleaning. Of course, I did want to object, but figured it wasn't worth the commotion it would surely cause. "I'll be happy to help prepare nice dinner for Lei," I said rather sugary, so I could show Charlotte that two can play the same game. I was tired and then asked if I could go to bed, and she wished me a good night.

The next morning, Lei slept in and I was gone before she awoke. I came home after a great day of studying, and began helping Ethel in the kitchen. At an opportune moment I asked her, "Ethel, I noticed that my underwear is gone from my drawer."

"All your underwear?"

"You know what I mean, my boys underwear! I can't understand how you can go through my drawers like that! I don't go through Charlotte's dresser."

"I should hope not!" Ethel said with alarm. "She made it very clear you were not to go in her room."

"I know all that, I haven't set foot in the mystery room, but I don't see why you can go through my drawers."

"Greg, there is nothing sinister about it! It was merely that since you're no longer wearing jockey shorts, Charlotte thought you would like to have more room in the dresser for the clothes you do wear. For example, you'll have to get a lot more panties, if you are to have enough for every day."

"I've got six pairs. How many more do I need?"

Ethel laughed, "gosh, most girls I know of, have like fifty pairs!"

"Very funny, but I'm not a girl, and they probably have so many cause they like to have lots of different kinds. I mean pretty ones and plain ones. Different colors."

"You're probably right. Anyway, we've only put them in storage and you can get them anytime you want."

"I guess its all right, I was just a little concerned. Anyway, if Lei tells my dad about my wearing panties, he's going to kill me, no matter what Charlotte says about it."

"She won't say anything, Greg, she's not interested in getting you into trouble. Charlotte and I both are just so pleased to see how close the two of you are. Many brothers and sisters don't have a real relationship like that."

I thought about what she said. Maybe in some ways Ethel was right, but it seemed to me that Lei was taking advantage of me being younger to avoid helping with the house work. Part of me was glad she was finally leaving. Then I wouldn't be pissed by her laziness. The first week had certainly gone by very fast, and I figured before I knew it the summer would be over.

At dinner that night, after a lot of talk about Lei's forthcoming adventure, in a lull in the conversation, I said, "The one good thing about Lei's leaving tomorrow is that I can finally move into her room!"

"Greg," Charlotte said matter of factly, "I've decided to keep you where you are."

"What!"

"I'm sorry, Greg,.."

"But you promised!"

"I didn't promise anything. The fact of the matter is that I may be having other guests this summer, and Lei's room is much more appropriate for entertaining them."

"So why should the girly room be OK for me? I'm a guest also!"

"This summer some business associates from out of town might need a place to stay, some men and some women, and I can't put them up in a young girls room. The pretty decorations are really for a young person."

"Girl, you mean!"

"Greg, that's the end of the discussion."

"Why don't your friends stay in a hotel?" I said.

"Greg, don't be rude," Ethel said in a sing song voice.

Charlotte eyed me steadily, and I ground my teeth wondering what else I could say. A whole summer in the girls room was ridiculous. I'd like to see if any of these other house guests ever materialized. It all seemed so phony to me.

It was about time to clear the dishes and Charlotte said, "so are we all set for tomorrow?"

"My flight is at 10 AM," Lei said.

"We'll get a cab and the four of us will go out to the airport to say goodbye," Charlotte said. "Then, in the afternoon, Greg, Ethel and I will go shopping."

"I can't Charlotte," I said with a certain amount of glee, "I'm seeing Linda and the other girls. We're going to a matinee."

"I'm sorry, Greg, but you should have asked me before you made plans," Charlotte said, "you'll have to go shopping with us."

"What do you mean?" I said with a definite rise in my voice.

"Ethel and I need you to hold some packages, and we also might want to get you some things."

"Hunh?" I practically shouted. "Its my Saturday. I have every right to go see my friends. I don't need any clothes and its ridiculous to have me walk around carrying packages."

"Don't raise your voice," Charlotte said.

Ethel said, "Greg, can't you change your plans to Sunday?"

"Why don't you change your plans to Sunday?" I said contemptuously.

I could see Lei, shifting uncomfortably in her chair.

"There's no way I'm not going to be with my friends tomorrow. I already promised them and you have no right to run my life like that!"

"That'll be enough of that, young man," Charlotte said with a distinct nastiness. "As long as you are living here you will do what I ask you to do. I am responsible for you, while your mom and dad are away and they have given me the authority to provide for your safety and care."

"What a pile of hooley," I said. "What's the danger? I'm going to a friggin matinee!"

"There will be no cursing in my apartment!" Charlotte said.

"I just said friggin!"

"Greg!" Ethel said, "calm down. You'll just have to postpone your activity to another day."

"I WILL NOT!" I exploded.

Charlotte leaned toward me on the other side of the table, and staring right at me said, making each word stick in the air like a knife, "you....will....do....as....I....say!"

"NO!" I shouted.

With great alarm in her voice Ethel said, "Greg, come on now.

You must behave."

"I AM BEHAVING! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME GO SHOPPING!"

"Charlotte,..." Lei said in what sounded like a pleading voice.

Charlotte rose from her seat and said evenly, "you will now clear the table, wash the dishes and then go to your room without dessert. Tomorrow, you will accompany us to the airport and then will go shopping with Ethel and I."

"You can't make me do that SHIT!"

"GREG! Shame on you! Ethel said.

"Oh, Greg," I heard Lei say, as Charlotte came right toward me. Before I knew what she was going to do, she grabbed my ear in her hand and twisted it. The pain was instant and caused me to double over with my head towards the ground.

She began forcing me toward my bedroom all the time squeezing my ear. While I screamed and whimpered in pain, Charlotte said, "you do not seem to have understood what I said about cursing in my house, besides your selfish defiance."

"I'M SORRY CHARLOTTE!" I screamed as she half dragged and half shoved me toward my room. She had my head twisted to the side at the level of her waist. I could see her stocking clad legs and the hem of her skirt. The pain in my ear was too much and I tried to force her hand off of it but I didn't have the strength to undo her grip.

I got a glimpse of Lei walking toward me, "Charlotte! You're hurting him!" she said.

Charlotte ignored her and kept pushing and dragging me into my bedroom. She kicked the door shut behind us and forced me into the bathroom.

"OUCH! CHARLOTTE, LET GO OF ME!" I cried.

"Greg!" I heard Lei shout through the door.

"The nerve of you!" Charlotte said. "I'll make sure this never happens again."

She pushed me into the pink bathroom and with her free hand, she grabbed the soap bar. "This is what happens to children who say bad words!"

"NO, NO, NO!" I screamed, "NOT THE SO..."

At that moment she forced the soap bar into my mouth, and I retched terribly at the taste. She took it out and while I sputtered and spit as much as I could she said, "and how does that feel?"

"TERRIBLE, I'M SORRY!"

"What are you not going to do anymore?" Charlotte said as she shoved the soap back into my mouth again.

My sounds were muffled by the soap. I was near suffocating now and she suddenly took out the soap, and let go of my ear. Hysterical, I turned on the water and began rinsing my mouth as fast as I could. Drinking and spitting. Charlotte grabbed my chin hard and turned my face towards hers and said in a very quiet, low voice, "when you are done getting yourself fixed up, you will come back to the dining room and make an apology to everyone. Then you will do the dishes and go to bed after that. Do you understand?"

I nodded "yes" but Charlotte repeated the question: "do you understand?"

"Yes," I said out loud.

"Good, and do not take too long."

After 15 minutes of drying my eyes and washing away the remaining soap, and looking to see if my ear was hurt, I heard Charlotte call, "Greg? Are you coming?"

"Yes," I called back, and then rejoined Charlotte, Ethel and Lei, who were sitting at the dining room table having some more of the coconut lemon cake from the previous day.

I stood near them. It looked to me that Lei had been crying. Ethel had a bright sunny smile on her face. "Feeling better?" she said.

"Yes." I mumbled.

"Greg has something to say," Charlotte said. "Greg?"

"Yeah, um, I'm sorry for cursing and everything."

"Sorry to who?"

"To you and Ethel and Lei."

"Will it ever happen again?"

"No."

"No, what?"

"No, Charlotte."

"Very good, Greg, I think you've grown up a lot. Now run along and do the dishes, and then we'll see you tomorrow. Good night."

"Good night," I said.

It took me a long time to fall asleep since it was so early. At one point, I put my ear to the door and could make out some of what was being said in the living room. I heard my name being said a lot, and then the impassioned words by Lei: "I don't see why you had to hurt him!"

This was followed by Charlotte's laugh: "appearances are deceiving."

"But still..." I heard Lei say.

Then there was something from Ethel about my mom and dad which I couldn't make out. After a short while, I grew tired and went to bed.

Sometime in the middle of the night I awoke to the sound of whispering. In the faint light coming from the hallway I could see the dark outlines of Charlotte and Ethel next to my bed looking down at me.

"Do you think he's OK?" I heard Charlotte whisper.

"Yeah, don't worry," Ethel said.

"If I did anything to hurt him, I'll never forgive myself!"

Charlotte said.

"Its OK, his ear is fine."

Charlotte leaned over me and I felt her hand gently touching the ear she had grabbed before. Then she straightened up and silently tip-toed out of the room, followed by Ethel.